Transcultural Rhythms: The Caribbean Grandmother Repeating Across Time and Space

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Abstract

The figure of the grandmother is a rhythm which repeats itself throughou Caribbean literature. The Caribbean literary grandmother owes a great deal to a history of hardship under slavery and post-emancipation struggles for self-realisation and empowerment.

This thesis explores the repeating theme of the grandmother-headed-household in literary works from Guadeloupe to Jamaica. The novels of Simone Schwarz-Bart, Joseph Zobel, Cecil Foster, Zee Edgell, Alvin Bennett, Cristina García and Pablo Medina are interrogated in this space to reveal the importance of the grandmother character as the backbone of the works. Other novels from the region will also be utilised as secondary texts to further demonstrate the timeless nature of the grandmother's primary role in cultural retention and in the writer's imagination.

Social-history provides an invaluable backdrop for understanding some of the dynamics involved in the West Indian family relationship and family structure. Theories as produced by theorists from within the region will be drawn upon alongside theories produced outside the Caribbean. These theories are included because they allow for a culturally distinct reading of Antillian literature that does not imprison the subject as reductionist, Eurocentric theory does. The combination of these theories will thereby allow the importance of the grandmother character to come through, not as a dysfunctional copy of European models, but rather as a character constructed within a unique cultural contexts on distinct cultural codes.

The premise of this thesis is the deconstruction of boundaries by highlighting the repeating grandmother rhythm. The established barriers serve to segregate works into groups based on language, nationality, gender, and ethnicity. Therefore, reading along the restrictive lines established by the latter has disallowed the rich understanding that an interdisciplinary study which crosses genre, gender, and lines of ethnicity reveals.

I dedicate this thesis to those grandmothers who exist beyond history, literature and even language. They are with us always.

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Mesi ampil a toot moun qui a parle ak mwe mem si mon *Créole* mon c'est perdie. Yo fe mon changé il à toujour lá. M' pa kapab sonje anye ce n'est pas posible. Lui l'histoir pouse thesis la pour finé.

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make the food, and who made sure that the work was not abandoned in the last minutes, by constantly reminding me that the computer was feeling lonely. I will always remember, as the Caribbean person says, that they didn't put me in but they could take me out.

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Gras a Dié et tous les saints!

DECLARATION

Herewith, I do declare that the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own, unless otherwise referenced and has not been, and has not been submitted for any other award. Portions of these chapters have, however, been presented as works in progress at various conferences during the period 1996 through 2000.

'Sister Ancestor: Female Bonding in *The Bridge of Beyond*'

West Indian Literature Conference,

March 1996

University of the West Indies,

St. Augustine, Trinidad.

'Female Spiritual Links in *Dreaming in Cuban*'

Caribbean Studies Association Conference,

May 1996,

San Juan Puerto Rico,

'Lo que bien se quiso nunca se olvida: Representations of Home in Cuban Exile Writing'.

West Indian Literature Conference,

April 1997 University of Miami,

Coral Gables, Miami, Florida.

'Ou Libéré: Memory Writing in Some Caribbean Women's Writing'

Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars Conference,

May 1998

Grenada W. I.

'Safety Zones: Restorying the Past'

1st International Conference on Caribbean Literature,

November, 1998.

Nassau, Bahamas.

'Memory Flows: The hyphen as Site of Resistance'

Transhistoric Thresholds Conference,

Arizona State University

December 1998.

'Rethinking Resistance: French Caribbean Writing'

2nd International Conference on Caribbean Literature,

November 1999,

Bermuda College.

Bermuda.

'Rhythmic Sexualities: Edwidge Danticat and Jamaica Kincaid'.

West Indian Literature Conference,

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Table of Contents

Introduction:
Considering the Grandmother as Primary Literary and Cultural Icon

PAGE

NUMBERING

AS ORIGINAL

> [Qui] frontières, souvent artificielles, qui amènent à l'enfermement des individus, des peuples et des cultures.[1]

> [F]or if the African diaspora is anything it is a necklace strung together by a thread known as the slave trade, a thread which made its way across a path of America with little regard for boundaries.[2]

> At the urging of local politicians, a stream of Caribbean youths had set out for places like London, Birmingham and Liverpool. [...] My brothers and I were living testament to this exodus, part of a generation left behind.[3]

Cecil Foster's quotation sets the scene for a generation of Caribbean youngsters left behind during and after World War II as their parents sorted out possibilities for advancement in England. These children were often left behind with their grandmothers or other female kin. In *Island Wings*, Foster tells the tale of his young life in Barbados and his experiences when, first, his father leaves for England and, second, his mother leaves. He relates the second event:

> What was unusual about this scene on the wharf was that traditionally it was not the women and mothers who left their children behind, but the men who went abroad. The man's role was defined by his ability to provide financial support for the family. If it was necessary for them to leave the island in order to make a living, society had come to terms with this, in some ways.[4]

Foster and his brothers are left behind with their paternal grandmother who provides them with their formative education and becomes their sole provider. She also serves as a base for one of the characters in his earlier novel, *No Man in the House*. The exodus cited was not unique to the period, however, as similar exoduses would continue, even after independence. As Foster observes, the dream of independence was '[...] born crippled, for [...] while it undermined the notion of a mother country, independence never really stanched the flow to foreign countries. We simply

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1 Émile Ollivier, 'Amélior la lisibilité du monde', in *Penser la Créolité* ed. by Maryse Condé and Madeleine Cottent-Hage, (Paris, Katharla, 1995), p. 255.

2 Michael Hanchard, 'Identity, Meaning and the African-American', *Social Text*, 24, 1990, p. 40.

3 Cecil Foster, *Island Wings: A Memoir* (Toronto, HarperCollins, 1998), p. 7.

4 Cecil Foster (1998), op. cit., p. 3.

substituted a New York, Miami, Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver for a London or Liverpool'.[5]

Grandmothers in many instances then became the only person with whom the third generation had any physical contact. Foster captures the youngsters' lives when he claims: 'we were like thousands of other young children scattered across the Caribbean(the left behind children. Children, whose lives of parental abandonment and denial were the final sacrifice to a dying colonial empire, the forerunners of what came to be known as the "barrel culture"'.[6]

While Foster's experience is as a British colonial subject, the trend that he articulates was not limited to the Anglophone Caribbean, but rather spanned the Francophone and Hispanophone areas of the region. The trend continues to the present day. The grandmother provides the foundation on which generations of grandchildren build their identity. Foster points out that: 'Great-Grand was [his paternal grandmother's] mother [who] had supposedly raised [his] father'.[7] He thereby illustrates that the same trend carried on from generation to generation.

It is from this tradition of the grandmother as sole provider that this thesis arises. The thesis proposes to explore the above link between the grandmother and her grandchildren, and the ways in which this link is exposed in the work of several prose fiction writers from the Caribbean. This thesis also draws on autobiographical information, often in the form of memoirs, that many of these writers provide along with their novels. With these facts in mind, it is not surprising that the grandmother character in Antillean literature should become such a strong locating device or metaphor for a connection to the past and the construction of an identity.

This thesis proposes to elucidate a link between texts by French, Spanish, and English Caribbean writers. It proposes to examine, within one overreaching framework, writing from Jamaica, Barbados, Belize, Martinique, Guadeloupe and the Cuban diaspora. It does not pretend to be exhaustive in its choice of texts or in its coverage of the theme. It rather offers a beginning to a dialogue on cultural repetitions through literature that joins the region by crossing seas and languages. It explores Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*,[8] Pablo Medina's *Exiled Memories: A*

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5 Ibid., p. 70.

6 Ibid., p. 69.

7 Ibid., p. 55.

8 Cristina García, *Dreaming in Cuban* (New York, Ballantine, 1992).

Cuban Childhood,[9] and *The Marks of Birth*,[10] Cecil Foster's *No Man in the House*[11] and *Sleep On, Beloved*,[12] Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb*,[13] Alvin Bennett's *God the Stonebreaker*,[14] Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*,[15] and Joseph Zobel's *La Rue Cases-Nègres*.[16] The similarities between the works selected, although they are separated by time and space, are significant. They all, as Simone Schwarz-Bart maintains about her own writing, draw on the grandmother's archetypal presence in their history.[17] They demonstrate that, even in exile, the grandmother continues to root her offspring in a sense of self and in their homeland. The grandmother is thus, as Patrick Chamoiseau refers to the main character in his novel, *Texaco*, 'the source'.[18] This source, through her ancestral knowledge and connection to the homeland, gives her offspring a sense of self, even if they experience physical or emotional exile.

The link through the grandmother as head of household or spiritual foundation is best elucidated through the juxtaposition of history and literature within a single study. This thesis uses the two fields as parallel 'texts' to better understand how these writers engage history, in general, and their personal histories, in particular, to narrate their stories. They articulate the significant roles that grandmothers play in their characters' lives and in the lives of their fictional communities. They endeavour to recreate the vibrant characters whom, to a large extent, history has silenced.

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9 Pablo Medina, *Exiled Memories: A Cuban Childhood* (Austin, Texas UP, 1990).

10 Pablo Medina, *The Marks of Birth* (New York, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1994).

11 Cecil Foster, *No Man in the House* (New York, Ballantine, 1992).

12 Ibid. *Sleep On, Beloved* (New York, One World, 1995).

13 Zee Edgell, *Beka Lamb* (London, Heinemann, 1982).

14 Alvin Bennett, *God the Stonebreaker* (London, Heinemann, 1973).

15 Simone Schwarz-Bart, *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1972).

16 Joseph Zobel, *La Rue Cases-Nègres* (Paris, Présence Africaine, 1974).

17 See: Catherine Le Pelletier, *Encre Noire: La Langue en liverté*. (Paris, IBIS Rouge Editions, 1998).

18 Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco* (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1992).

The grandmother in Caribbean literature personifies cultural unity or rhythm which crosses boundaries—*[f]rontières, souvent artificielles, qui amènent à l'enfermement des individus, des peuples et des cultures*'[19]—and acts as a unifying agent, an archetype of cultural bonding. The thesis refers to this archetypal presence in the collective unconscious of the community of which she is a part. The thesis limits its study of this character or repeating rhythm within the Caribbean but does not claim that it is an exclusively Caribbean trend. Nevertheless, based on the historical context mentioned above she takes on particular importance in the region. The thesis argues that there are socio-historical factors which have combined to make the presence of the older woman a strong symbol of the familial emotional support and of culture, particularly in the West Indies.

Analysis shows that many households in Caribbean societies are headed by women.[20] Often, older women take the responsibility not only for their own children and grandchildren but other youngsters also. These women-headed households often exist with minimal, if any, male input. While it could be argued that this is a period-specific phenomenon, from about the 1920s through to the struggle for independence, about the 1960s. This was a period of hardship, as Foster's quote illustrates, and shortage for many in the region, it does seem to reappear with some regularity in spite of changing times. Furthermore, it is still present in the 1990s and into the twenty first century. In many of the Antilles,[21] a social trend also exists where a group of people live in individual houses within one space with one of the residents being in charge of its organisation. These spaces are often referred to as house yards. The family units therein are often run by older women as well, and the position of authority is passed on from one woman to another, perhaps through a familial connection, or, if the direct bloodline does not continue, to another female who may be a part of the extended family or a part of a constructed kinship network. Again, the women in charge often also take responsibility for their grandchildren's care giving. Considering these details, this thesis identifies a need to explore the link between the social reality as lived by some of the Caribbean's

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19 Emile Ollivier, 'Amélior la lisibilité du monde', in *Penser la Créolité* ed. by Maryse Condé and Madeleine Cottent-Hage, (Paris, Katharla, 1995), p. 255.

20 For further discussion on this theme see: Erna Brodber, *Perceptions of Caribbean Women: Towards a Documentation of Stereotypes* (Bridgetown Barbados, Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1982).

21 The term Caribbean will be used interchangeably with West Indian and Antilles. Historically, these terms have always been used to contextually connote a distinction between the Antilles which are often seen as the Lesser Antilles and Windward Islands and the French islands, while West Indies was employed to refer to the former British islands. For the purposes of this study then, there will be no difference between them.

inhabitants and ways in which it translates into the literature. A connection between social history and literature is inevitable, as the former has an apparent direct or indirect impact on the latter.

The 'grandmother character', as depicted in some works of West Indian narrative fiction, parallels a thread that strings the region together, similar to the image of the necklace that Michael Hanchard uses.[22] Her appearance in some literary texts is similar to the way in which particular characters recur in folktales, as Vladimir Propp discusses in his *Morphology of the Folktale*.[23] Propp investigates the occurrence and recurrence of characters in folktales, analysing how many times each character is repeated, how often it appears, and in how many tales it appears. This thesis examines the presence of the grandmother in a similar way to Propp, except that the primary focus is on specific texts here, although other secondary texts where the grandmother features prominently are also discussed.

The figure of the grandmother is like a submerged link which resurfaces in various texts within the Caribbean region. Memory becomes an important tool in literary renderings of this figure. In *Caribbean Discourse*, Édouard Glissant observes that '[b]ecause the collective memory was often wiped out, the Caribbean writer must "dig deep" into this memory, following the latent signs that he has picked up in every day life'.[24] Digging into this memory, the Caribbean writer uncovers the archetypal grandmother. Memory also determines how the grandmother from real life is reconstructed as a literary figure.

This thesis explores the interconnected repetitions of the depiction of the Caribbean grandmother in the works of seven Caribbean fiction writers. It uses these works, not as representatives of the whole body of literature, but rather as a window into Caribbean cultural expression. The grandmother, seen as source of ancestral knowledge and sole provider of love, comfort, and economic and emotional support, is repeated across the Caribbean despite linguistic, political, geographic, and cultural boundaries. This work examines the blurring of boundaries, their transgressions and transcendences as a range of Caribbean writers attempt to capture the reality which they have lived by centering on the grandmother figure, a constantly repeated motif in their works.

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22 Michael Hanchard (1990), op. cit., p. 40.

23 Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* trans. by Louis A. Wagner, (Austin, Texas UP, 1968).

24 Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. by J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville, Virginia UP, 1989), p. 64.

Through a close scrutiny of the grandmother as a central element of West Indian cultural bonding, this work seeks to illustrate that the Caribbean archipelago is closely linked in its literary imagination and cultural practices, becoming, metaphorically speaking, an island that repeats itself, as Antonio Benítez-Rojo claims in *The Repeating Island*:

> Beneath the turbulence of *árbol*, *arbre*, tree, etc., there is an island that repeats itself until transforming into a meta-archipelago and reaching the most widely separated transhistorical frontiers of the globe. There's no center or circumference, but there are common dynamics that express themselves in a more or less regular way within the chaos and then, gradually, begin assimilating into African, European, Indoamerican, and Asian contexts up to the vanishing point.[25]

One example of common dynamics which express themselves in a 'more or less' regular way within chaos is embodied in the figure of the grandmother, which repeats itself rhythmically across time and space. Benítez-Rojo's theory will be employed as a point of departure from which to consider the grandmother rhythm in several pivotal works of fiction across the region.

The thesis chooses to explore the figure of the grandmother in literature in order to draw attention to her importance in the lives of the writers themselves. It therefore intends to explore the connections between literature and history and the erasure of barriers between the two genres. This blurring is explicitly evidenced in the inclusion of authors' memoirs and autobiographies that draw links with their fictional texts.

The Hispanic Caribbean texts examined here have been purposely chosen from the Cuban-American exile community because they articulate the continuity of the importance of the grandmother character beyond the West Indies' geographic limits into North America. Benítez-Rojo claims that cities like Miami and New York are Caribbean cities because they have that repeating rhythm of Caribbeanness. While the thesis explores works in the three language groups, it does realise that the works in the Hispanic section are for the most part written in English, though they do contain Cuban-Spanish phrases and sayings. This code switching or simultaneous existence in two languages reflects the authors' existence on the border between English and Spanish and thereby articulates a further creolisation of identity and culture that occurs in the metropolis. These texts are also significant because they capture the importance of the grandmother with seemingly heightened

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25 Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective (Post-Contemporary Interventions)* (Durham, Duke UP, 1992/96), p. 24.

sensitivity, almost as if she were magnified. She becomes a personification or an embodiment of the home to which the writers no longer have access. Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* provides a view into the politics of the exile community and a rare glimpse of the cross-fertilisation that can be possible between the United States and Cuba were it not for the hard political borders erected by the US embargo and the Cuban exiles' hard-line anti-Castro philosophy.[26] García allows her characters to move in and out of Cuba, an *hecho* that is frowned upon by the extremely political community. The inclusion of Pablo Medina's *The Marks of Birth*, and his memoir, *Exile Memories: A Cuban Childhood*,[27] along with Flor Fernández Barrios's *Blessed by Thunder: A Memoir of a Cuban Girlhood*,[28] allows for a re-reading of the blurred lines between the literary text and the semi-historical, autobiographical document.

Nostalgia for home and the old days that is so palpable in the exile experience becomes ever more poignant where it relates to the grandmother, because she is so intricately bound up in the process of re-membering, re-constructing and re-living the old days in the nostalgic homeland that has been lost to them. Her character thereby becomes almost larger than life, and the influence she has over her offspring seems almost mythical. It is precisely this relationship between the grandmother of reality and the incredible, mythical character constructed in the fictional works that the thesis wishes to explore.

In the French Caribbean, the selection of Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*[29] from Guadeloupe and Joseph Zobel's *La Rue Cases-Nègres* from Martinique was due in part to the importance of these two writers in the historical moments in which their novels were published.[30] Zobel, writing in 1957, forms a part of a newer generation of writers who begin to incorporate creole culture and speech patterns into their stories. Also, both Schwarz-Bart and Zobel produce their works after a return to their home islands from studies in France and beyond. They create works which re-evaluate and revalidate their culture and the importance of that with

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26 Cristina García, *Dreaming in Cuban* (New York, Ballantine, 1992).

27 Pablo Medina, *The Marks of Birth* (New York, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1994); Pablo Medina, *Exiled Memories: A Cuban Childhood* (Austin, Texas UP, 1990).

28 Flor Fernández Barrios, *Blessed by Thunder: A Memoir of a Cuban Girlhood* (Seattle, Seal Press, 1999).

29 Simone Schwarz-Bart, *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1972).

30 Joseph Zobel, *La Rues Cases-Nègres* (1957) (Paris, Présence Africaine, 1974).

which they have grown up. These novels appear at a time during which the assertion of an identity other than that provided by the official French model was becoming a more significant trope in writing. The writers capture in their works a coming of age or maturity that allows them an appreciation of their past which may not have been present before. It is arguably, therefore, a revalidation of creole culture that is so undervalued within an assimilationist society.

Dany Bébel-Gisler's *Leonora: The Buried Story of Guadeloupe* provides a valuable counter piece to these novels,[31] as it is the story of one woman's life and the changes she goes through, and has seen the country go through, over her sixty-year existence. She articulates these same concerns of revalidating the French Antilles' cultural diversity from France, having grown up at a time when being Guadeloupean was viewed with some degree of derision. New cultural symbols would result from this new self-identification. Both Schwarz-Bart and Zobel capture in their works the foundational presence of their grandmother characters that is arguably linked to an important socio-historical moment that allows for this self-revalidation. The relationship between grandmother and grandchild is lived during the period of France's colonisation of Guadeloupe and Martinique and their eventual full incorporation into France. One can live outside that model and still exist.

A similar trend of new self-assertion and identification is also evidenced in the Anglophone Caribbean texts. Barbadian Cecil Foster's *No Man in the House*[32](1992) and Jamaican Alvin Bennett's *God the Stonebreaker* (1973) delve into a similar cultural re-evaluation and revalidation as do Schwarz-Bart's and Zobel's texts.[33] Foster's *Island Wings* proves an invaluable companion for these literary texts. They all present stories of important moments in the development of an identity, cultural and individual, that appears to be intricately wound around the presence of their grandmother characters. In Foster's novel, for example, the grandmother is the only permanent adult presence in the boys' lives and her awakening awareness to the need for a political change in the island is passed down to them.

These works are significant in that they articulate some of the problems that colonisation and imperialism have left behind and the agendas present in many

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31 Dany Bébel-Gisler, *Leonora: The Buried Story of Guadeloupe* (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1995).

32 Cecil Foster, *No Man in the House* (New York, Ballantine, 1992).

33 Alvin Bennett, *God the Stonebreaker* (London, Heinemann, 1973).

historical descriptions of Caribbean women. The novels illustrate that, similar to the images presented by slave owners which depicted black women as beasts of burden, the women indeed did work like slaves, but they had no other real option. They either worked or starved. Foster mentions this social reality when he discusses the struggle for independence in Barbados.

> Errol Barrow, then premier of Barbados [...] said he envisioned the day when a sugar cane blade would not cut his face, when the women of the island would no longer be reduced "to being beasts of burden" working in the cane fields in conditions no different from in the days of slavery.[34]

The relationship the grandmothers in these novels have with their offspring and their societies is directly linked to the theme of what Barbara Bush calls slave women's resistance to slavery even though they may have been seen to have been complicit in their enslavement.[35] They teach their offspring to always appear acquiescent to the master's wishes, but to simultaneously educate themselves so that they can move beyond the delimited space of cane cutter, for example. They refuse to surrender to the former slave master's exploitation and marginalisation of them, even when it becomes violent. Their relationship with their offspring is unique. These women want their grandchildren to do better than they were able to in their own lives. These trends, prevalent from post-emancipation up to the post-war generation, are still present in poorer communities where the women torture themselves through hard work to ensure the success of their offspring.

The need to press for improvement with the next generation was particularly important after emancipation as the former enslaved strove to get out of the fields and/or to get their children out of the fields. This trend toward self-improvement continued into the post-war years as poverty was such an omnipresent reality in the West Indies that people focused their energies on moving up the socio-economic ladder whenever possible. Education was one concrete way to create this possibility.

The writers draw clear links to socio-historical situations that actually occurred, by creating similar experiences with exploitation and hardship and historical events in their characters' lives. This fictionalising of reality can be seen in autobiographical novels such as George Lamming's *In The Castle of My Skin*, and is

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34 Foster (1998) op. cit., p. 45.

35 Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society 1650-1838* (London, James Curry, 1990).

clearly pronounced in Foster's *Island Wings*.[36] Meanwhile, the thesis also explores the exploitation of women in these colonised societies and the relationships that the grandmothers and 'Othermothers' have with these situations.

It is to illustrate the importance of 'Othermothers' and the hardships they faced that the thesis has included Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb*.[37] While this novel, like those mentioned above, explores the coming of age of the community and of the protagonist, it also illustrates the importance of the female network in holding the community together. Edgell's work focuses on how the female network comes together in order to move beyond the adversity of exploitation and colonisation, both mental and physical. Foster also points this out in *Island Wings*, where his maternal grandmother, once he went to live with her, would call on her family and kin to help her when it was time for him to go to school, for example: 'Grandmother rose to the occasion and sent out an S. O. S., of sorts, to just about every member of the family'.[38] He then goes on to elaborate on how each person contributed.

The secondary texts discussed throughout the thesis have been chosen because they highlight elements present in the primary texts, simultaneously widening the cross section of texts chosen. Having a larger number of texts makes the study a more thorough or representative examination of the grandmother figure, by pointing out that her importance is not limited to the seven primary authors, but spans a wider gamete of writers.

In the case of the Francophone Antilles, Edwidge Danticat's work was chosen for its specifically Haitian experience which still points to an underlying commonality among Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique.[39] Significantly, similar to the novels representing the Hispanic Caribbean, Danticat's works are written in English. In addition, these texts, as do Medina's and García's, employ French or *Créole* language patterns and phrases. While there exists perhaps myriad works that illustrate the relationship between the grandmother and her grandchildren, it is these writers' ability to articulate their stories and relate them to socio-historical moments, that speaks for a profound link between the lived experience and the creative process. This link requires that these works be included here in a study that

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36 George Lamming, *In The Castle of My Skin* (New York Macmillan, 1953).

37 Zee Edgell, *Beka Lamb* (London, Heinemann, 1982).

38 Foster (1998) op. cit., p. 127.

39 Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (New York, Vintage, 1994); Danticat, *Krik? Krak!* (New York, Soho, 1995).

deconstructs boundaries between disciplines and languages to forge a new dialogue across the islands.

Mapping a Cultural Field

In Caribbean studies, critical works have usually dealt either with one or two literatures. This thesis will use texts drawing on three languages.[40] The conflation of a cultural studies approach to the literature of the Spanish, French, and English Caribbean provides a different slant to a purely literary study.[41] While Benítez-Rojo works across the Caribbean, his analysis is often based on Cuba and refers back to Cuba as its principal source. He examines writers from the wider Caribbean such as Derek Walcott, Wilson Harris and Gabriel García Márquez, all of whom he compares to Alejo Carpentier and other Cuban writers. Those comparisons are, however, the extent of his discussion on transculturation. He neither fully explores the Francophone Caribbean nor does he study the Anglophone Caribbean in detail, though in the second edition of *The Repeating Island*, he includes the latter in the context of carnival. Meanwhile, Carole Boyce Davies and 'Molara Ogundipe-Leslie also articulate a similar need to deconstruct cultural boundaries in literary studies.[42] Their work concentrates specifically on black women's writing.

The last decade has seen a significant rise in the number of critics reading across the Caribbean. Alongside Benítez-Rojo's theory for a place in cross-cultural study is Simon Gikandi's *Writing in Limbo*. Gikandi proposes to read across the

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40 Fernandez Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert eds. 'Introduction: Religious Syncretism and Caribbean Culture'. *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah, and the Caribbean* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 1997), pp. 1-12; See particularly: p. 9.

41 For more details see: Silvio Torres-Saillant, *Caribbean Poetics: Toward an Aesthetic of West Indian Literature* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1997); See also: Selwyn R. Cudjoe, *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* (Athens, Ohio UP, 1980); Pamela Mordecai and Betty Wilson, eds. *Her True-True Name: An Anthology of Women's Writing from the Caribbean* (Oxford, Heinemann, 1990); Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, eds. *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature* (Trenton, Africa World Press, 1990); Carmen C. Esteves and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, eds. *Green Cane and Juicy Flotsam: Short Stories by Caribbean Women* (New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers UP, 1991); Barbara Howes, *From the Green Antilles: Writings of the Caribbean* (New York, Macmillan, 1966).

42 Carole Boyce Davies and 'Molara Ogundipe-Leslie eds. *Moving Beyond Boudaries Volume 1: International Dimensions of Black Women's Writing* (London, Pluto, 1995); Carole Boyce Davies, *Moving Beyond Boundaries, Volume 2: Black Women's Diasporas* (London, Pluto, 1995); See also: Mirta Yáñez ed., *Cubana: Contemporary Fiction by Cuban Women* trans. by Dick Cluster and Cindy Schuster (Boston, Beacon Press, 1998); Ruth Behar 'Forward'. *Cubana* op. cit., pp. vii-xix.; Mirta Yáñez, 'Introduction: Women's Voices from the Great Blue River'. *Cubana* op. cit., pp. 1-20.

Caribbean using modernism as his critical tool.[43] He thoroughly explores the implications of Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* as a book which explores coming of age; individually, emotionally, politically, and communally. As with many of the others, Gikandi's text is limited in its linguistic breadth. He limits his text to two linguistic blocs and '[t]he Antillean books examined do not get a chance to yield the clues to their own explications'.[44] That considered, the field continues to grow, and critics such as Silvio Torres–Saillant and Michael Dash endeavour to read across the region using other theories in their studies. Both Dash and Torres-Saillant read works with their cultural and historical background in mind. Their studies examine some commonalities that may exist between writers while drawing them together under a similar theme as does Édouard Glissant with his theory of *antillanité*.

In an attempt at encouraging such transgressions, A. James Arnold has produced a comprehensive study of the literature of the region in a three-volume project, *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*.[45] Other scholars have also attempted to dismantle the boundaries created by linguistic and political differences. Silvio Torres-Saillant's *Caribbean Poetics* is one of the cross-cultural studies to join this list.[46] In his book, Torres-Saillant addresses missing voices in West Indian literary studies; but, nevertheless focuses on male writers, namely Edward Kamau Brathwaite, René Depestre and Pedro Mir.[47] Michael Dash's recent pan-Caribbean work, *The Other America*, which marks a departure from his theory that Antillean literature did not necessarily show a commonality as others claimed, falls into the same pattern.[48] He also focuses on male writers, giving female writers cursory attention in the process.

The field is, therefore, taking on a different shape as the above works should show. This form refutes previously held beliefs in the need to divide the region and

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43 Simon Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (Ithaca, Cornell UP, 1992).

44 Torres-Saillant (1997), op. cit., p. 25.

45 A. James Arnold, ed. A History of Literature in the Caribbean: Volume 1 Hispanic and Francophone Regions (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing, 1994); A. James Arnold, ed. A History of Literature in the Caribbean: Volume 3 Cross-Cultural Studies (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1997). The 2nd volume, which examines the development of a literary tradition in the Anglophone and Dutch-speaking Caribbean, is not available thus far.

46 Silvio Torres-Saillant (1997).

47 Torres-Saillant (1997).

48 J. Michael Dash, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1998).

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give expression to all those occasions when these barriers were partially broken'.[52] In reading the Caribbean in this way, a richer textual understanding will be achieved and the overlap between literary production and cultural memory will become evident. Tracing the repetition of the grandmother character in West Indian literature is a way of breaking these barriers. A combining of theories as diverse as those found in Rosemary George's *The Politics of Home* and Édouard Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse*, is at the rubric of this study, which is built around the idea of the repeating island.[53] Thus, the thesis illustrates that the so-called subaltern is not silent but vocal, particularly in forming alternatives to hegemonic discourse, and allows for a richer texturing and a broader cross-cultural and inter-disciplinary approach.

The first problem that arises when a study crosses physical and political borders and boundaries, however, as Benítez-Rojo points out, particularly in the case of the Caribbean, is the polylingualism of the region.[54] The second is the Caribbean writers' reliance on history and their continual interrogation of official historical discourse with their own histories and their own stories. As Jacques Derrida argues, as soon as one imposes a boundary and states that it may not be transgressed or blurred, the exact opposite immediately happens.[55] This is similar to Glissant's insistence that the impossibility creates the challenge and by so doing encourages the individual to insist on the possibility and the validity of such a transgression.

The first problem feeds into a third problem of exclusivity, which is the lack of critical material that crosses all these frontiers to unite the region in one study while also appreciating the cultural integrity and specific characteristics, or uniqueness, of each part of the whole. Many critics refuse to deconstruct boundaries in favour of the flowing similarity hypothesised by Benítez-Rojo and Glissant. Some critics, conversely, focus on cultural differences and the language barriers that re-segregate the region into its linguistic, geographic, political, and cultural blocks. Benítez-Rojo argues that an 'attempt to refer the culture of the Caribbean to

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[52] Ibid.

[53] Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* (New York, Cambridge UP, 1996); See also: Glissant, (1989).

[54] Benítez-Rojo (1996).

[55] Jacques Derrida, 'La Loi du genre/The Law of Genre' *Glyph*, 7 (1980), pp. 176-232; See also: Caren Kaplan, 'Resisting Autobiography: Out-Law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects', in *De/colonising the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography* ed. by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 115-138.

geography—other than to call it a meta-archipelago', is a 'debilitating and scarcely productive project'.[56]

The transculturation that Benítez-Rojo articulates is evident in the Caribbean as soon as one crosses the border from the Spanish-speaking Dominican Republic to *Créole* / French-speaking Haiti. At that point the traveller encounters people who will attempt to communicate in a number of languages until arriving at a mutually intelligible one. Due to the political imposition of a border, the belief that there is no cultural flow or cultural continuity has grown. However, the idea of cultural isolation must be challenged. To find this transculturation or cultural continuity, or basic repeating rhythm, as Benítez-Rojo terms it, one must examine Caribbean texts with an eye willing to uncover repetitions.

Benítez-Rojo goes on to argue that in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of Caribbean literature the reader must reread the text; a first reading is not sufficient to get the fuller meanings of the text:

> A rereading would require of us to stop to look at the rhythms proper to Caribbean literature. Here we will soon notice the presence of several rhythmic sources: Indoamerica, Africa, Asia, and Europe. Well, as we know, the polyrhythmic play that makes up the copper, black, yellow, and white rhythms (a conventional way of differentiating them) that issue from the sources has been described and analyzed in the most diverse ways and through the most varied disciplines.[57]

As mentioned earlier, one of these rhythms repeating across the region is characterised by the grandmother archetype. The term rhythm will be utilised to represent the constant repetition and continuation of the grandmother across the region. As an archetype, she is the link that bonds diverse cultures. The term rhythm will be used over trope, motif, and theme because it allows for a different or fuller understanding of the importance of the grandmother character within the region. Rhythm and archetype will be conflated, perhaps not unproblematically, to illustrate the human depth invested here in rhythm. Archetype implies a deep connection to an entire community that surfaces in its collective unconscious and so they as a whole share a profound experience with the grandmother.

When the word rhythm is enunciated it is used to mean the repetition of a constant beat; an articulation, theme or presence that moves across a continuum in a

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[56] Benítez-Rojo, op. cit., p. 24.

[57] Benítez-Rojo, op. cit., p. 26.

regular or certain kind of way that is particular to the Caribbean. This rhythm repeats across time and space, but is never exactly the same. This leads to the need to articulate rhythm as a polyrhythm. Cultural diversity and individual characteristics make for a unique rendering in each place. Benítez-Rojo uses the term 'in a certain kind of way' to refer to a style that is typically Cuban and, by extension, typically Caribbean. It is this 'certain kind of way' that is important to this study of the grandmother rhythm which repeats in a certain regular way that is uniquely Caribbean.

She links the region through her role as principal character within the home. Trope, theme, and motif rely more on literary depiction and thereby neither denote nor do they connote the same depth of cultural importance that archetype, particularly as elucidated in the Jungian sense, signals.[58] The grandmother, as archetype, embodies all the worlds which have merged in the Caribbean, and is a composite of many aspects of different cultures. The grandmother, as this thesis postulates, is therefore the unifying element in Caribbean society and literature. In this way she personifies the '*informing spirit*' that Raymond Williams refers to in *Culture*.[59]

This thesis posits that in spite of differences, the novels herein examined 'do justice to reality' and thereby allow 'a full realization of the subject', namely the grandmother.[60] The texts present a constructed story of life that captures fully the grandmother's foundational role in her society. Verisimilitude created within the texts allows the art form to translate a real account of life in the islands into fiction.[61] Therefore 'in order to reread the Caribbean we have to visit the sources from which the widely various elements that contributed to the formation of its culture flowed'.[62] As this thesis argues, in diverse writings from the West Indies, the grandmother personifies one of these sources and contributes to cultural formation. The seven writers considered here share the foregrounding of the grandmother's

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58 For more information on this approach see: Demaris S. Wehr, *Jung and Feminism: Liberating Archetypes* (Boston, Beacon, 1987); C. G. Jung, *Aspects of the Feminine* trans. by R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, Princeton UP, 1982).

59 Raymond Williams, *Culture* (Glasgow, Fontana, 1981), pp. 11-13.

60 Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, Chicago Up, 1961), pp.37-38.

61 See: Northrop Frye's use of 'Realism' and verisimilitude in *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, Princeton UP, 1957), p. 136.

62 Benítez-Rojo op. cit., p. 12.

importance with other texts as diverse as Olive Senior's 'The Two Grandmothers',[63] Raphaël Confiant's *Ravines du devant-jour*,[64] Velma Pollard's 'My Mother'[65] and 'Gran',[66] Eduardo Manet's *Rhapsodie Cubaine*,[67] and Gisèle Pineau's *L'Exile selon Julia*.[68]

The thesis is limited in its approach to the Caribbean. While it does claim transversality or globality, it must recognise its exclusions. It does not include the Dutch Caribbean, or Dutch islands of Aruba, St. Maarten, Curaçao or the others, where there is a body of literature. This is due in part to both a lack of linguistic competence and of space. Nor does it explore in any great depth the Indo-Caribbean experience. While V. S. Naipaul's work is employed in various instances as secondary sources, it is felt that far too detailed an analysis would be required in order to adequately address the cultural specificity of that experience. A very large East Indian population exists in the Caribbean, as well as large Asian and South Pacific populations, but the first has tended to separate itself from the black Caribbean, Creole or white Caribbean, creating an almost segregated group. This separation has perhaps been due to ethnic differences like religion and language, which have lead to resistance to inter-marriage and cross-racial communication.[69] Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance* superficially deals with the separations within the community.[70] So, while V. S. Naipaul's *A House For Mr. Biswas* presents a powerful older woman in the character of Mrs. Tulsi,[71] it also illustrates how the

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63 Olive Senior, 'The Two Grandmothers', in *Caribbean New Wave* ed. by Stewart Brown (Oxford, Heinemann, 1990), pp. 159-170.

64 Raphaël Confiant, *Ravines du devant-jour* (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1993).

65 Velma Pollard, 'My Mother' in *Caribbean New Wave* op. cit. pp. 148-152.

66 Velma Pollard, 'Gran' in *Considering Woman* (London, The Women's Press, 1989), pp. 34-72.

67 Eduardo Manet, *Rhapsodie Cubaine* (Paris, Grasset, 1996).

68 Gisèle Pineau, *l'Exile selon Julia* (Paris, Stock, 1996).

69 This thesis however sees the need to point out that while there is perhaps a marked separation in cities, the reality in the country is much less segregated. It therefore states that it in no way presumes to perpetuate the constructed dichotomies between Indo Trinidadians and Creole Trinidadians. There are no omnipresent barriers or hard and fast polarities.

70 Earl Lovelace, *The Dragon Can't Dance*(London, Longman, 1979).

71 V. S. Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas* (London, Andre Deutsch, 1961).

cultural nuances require a deeper examination than could be achieved within the scope of this thesis. While disclaiming that these works are invalid or that they do not warrant inclusion, or that no significant body of literature exists, as a very sizeable one thrives, it is simply, once again, the severe space limitations that dictate.

Theoretical Considerations

The West Indies are creole, a result of a transhistorical link that exists, even if somewhat submerged.[72] Glissant refers to this creole connection as *antillanité*, asserting the Caribbean's relatedness.[73] As Torres-Saillant observes,

> This view of the Caribbean as a culturally homogenous totality, one that numbers Glissant among its most eloquent proponents, has become well known in the Francophone Caribbean. Termed "antillanité," the notion came to occupy in the minds of notable intellectuals, the place formerly accorded to the concept of negritude.[74]

This thesis embraces the idea of *antillanité*, or *antillanidad* as an articulation of the diverse nature of the Caribbean and the sameness of the Caribbean rhythm that pervades the writing. It is preferable to a philosophy such as *négritude* precisely because it goes beyond the limitations of colour or ethnicity inherent in *négritude*.[75] *Négritude* was a cultural movement that reacted to the domination of European models and posited a celebration of blackness and African-based arts over former ideals.

Moreover, while national identity is at the core of many of the works herein examined, individual and community identity are just as important. Torres-Saillant succinctly and systematically evaluates the arguments against Caribbean commonality used over the years and, in their place, asserts the need to dismantle those barriers to enable a reading that can flow from French national space into Spanish national space without negating individuality or cultural specificity, but combining it with regional commonality. The rhythm then that repeats across time and space, that proponents, such as Glissant, refer to as *antillanité*, is very much alive, as evidenced when employing these tools to read the Caribbean.

As Torres-Saillant maintains, it is essential to use West Indian theory or Antillean texts to critique Caribbean literature. Thus, this thesis will employ a

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72 See: Glissant, (1989); Édouard Glissant, *Introduction à une Poétique du Divers* (Paris, Gallimard, 1996).

73 For further discussion on Caribbean relatedness see: Glissant (1989)

74 Torres-Saillant (1997), op. cit., p. 41.

75 For more details see: Torres-Saillant (1997); Chris Bongie, *Islands and Exiles: The Creole Identities of Post/Colonial Literature* (Stanford, Stanford UP, 1998). Bongie goes into a very detailed discussion on the varying approaches to and philosophies of Creoleness.

variety of representative Caribbean theories. A term such as Bhabha's hybridity will be used sparingly and with caution.[76] The term *antillanité*, Caribbeanness, over *créolité* will be called upon to identify the Caribbbean's rich diversity.[77] *Antillanité* or Caribbeanness will be used as a marker of cultural, ethnic, and religious diversities, to mention only a few aspects of the créolness, inherent in the region that must be considered when reading a West Indian text. Such a term, because it is not reductive or essentialist but all encompassing, and specifically because it is a creation of the region, best fits the reality therein. *Antillanité*/Caribbeanness/créoleness allows works of women, men, whites, blacks, Hispanics, East Indians, Portuguese to all be considered together.[78] This grouping was impossible under *négritude* theory. According to Torres-Saillant: 'we should remain constantly aware of the fact that black is not the only Caribbean color. The Caribbean experience of other racial groups should not be exiled from our discourse'.[79] This thesis argues precisely in favour of this racial diversity which must be acknowledged and engaged with in order to fully understand West Indian literature. *Antillanité* allows for combining texts by writers separated by nationality and colour without becoming a polemical issue. Following Torres-Saillant, it is essential to allow all this multiplicity of differences to work together. By so doing, Cristina García and Pablo Medina can be read in the same study as Joseph Zobel and Cecil Foster based on their Caribbeanness and the fact that they articulate a common theme: the grandmother.

Distinctions in class may be present and the thesis in no way chooses to elide such differences. Not only does it recognise them, it also attempts to read beyond them. As both Glissant and Benítez-Rojo affirm, *antillanité* and *antillanidad* argue for

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76 See: Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994), op. cit., in general for discussion of hybridity and particularly 'Signs taken for Wonders: Questions of ambivalence and authority under a tree outside Delhi, May 1817'. (1994), op. cit., pp. 102-122.

77 For more information on *antillanité* see: Torres-Saillant (1997); Beverly Ormerod, *An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel* (London, Heinemann, 1985); Bongie (1998); Glissant (1989); See also: Belinda Edmondson, *Making Men: Gender, Literary Authority, and Women's Writing in Caribbean Narrative* (Durham, Duke UP, 1999).

78 For further discussion on this see: Celia M. Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance* (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1999); Dash, (1998); Belinda J. Edmundson, ed., *Caribbean Romances: The Politics of Regional Representation* (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1999); Belinda J. Edmondson, 'Introduction: The Caribbean: Myths, Tropes, Discourses', in Belinda J. Edmondson ed., op. cit., pp. 1-11; Richard Price and Sally Price, 'Shadowboxing in the Mangrove: The Politics of Identity in Postcolonial Martinique' in Belinda J. Edmondson ed., op. cit., pp. 123-162.

79 Torres-Saillant (1997), op. cit., p. 58.

a continued process and not for a fixity of creoleness.[80] The work, therefore, must also examine the link of García's character, Celia, with Schwarz-Bart's character, Reine Sans Nom and how the links cross and re-cross the region.

Glissant's *antillanité* is preferred here over *créolité* as constructed by the *créolité* group of Chamoiseau, Confiant, and Bernabé.[81] This preference is due mainly to *créolité's* remasculinisation of the discourse.[82] So, women, according to the créolité group, are of marginal importance in the Caribbean oral cultural tradition. Chamoiseau, particularly, has argued for male storytellers and *griots*, who would replace the women who also held those positions. Here again the import of reading women writers alongside male writers is shown. This group also chooses to focus once again on nationalism and the primacy of writing in *Créole* in deciding whether a work can be considered to be a Caribbean work, as opposed to the universality or commonality of Caribbean writing in general with an inclusion of those texts which do not function solely in *Créole*, but promote a mixture between the standard colonial language and creolised forms.

Micheline Rice-Maximin's observations of the grandmother's primary role would also problematise Chamoiseau's argument.[83] In contrast, Glissant's theory of *antillanité* does not deny gender a space, or women's participation within the discourse. Notwithstanding these observations, *créolité* is still a very important movement and in many ways both *créolité* and *antillanité* are not mutually exclusive. Both see the importance of the *griot* in passing down a story to a writer within the community. In the texts explored here, the stories are passed down to allow for their continuation. The story or history is a way of teaching the community how to survive.

The grandmother rhythm is intricately bound up with place and language. It is therefore necessary when exploring the importance of the grandmother to delve into how she relates to both plantation and language. During slavery, it was essential for the enslaved people, when communicating between themselves, to avoid

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80 See also: Dash, (1998), op. cit., pp. 10-14.

81 Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, *Lettres Créole: Tracées antillaises et continentales de la littérature 1633-1975* (Paris, Hatier, 1991); Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, *Éloge de la Créolité* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins UP, 1990, Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1989).

82 See: A. James Arnold, 'The Gendering of Créolité' in *Penser la Créolité* ed. by Maryse Condé et Madeleine Cottent-Hage, (Paris, Karthala, 1995), pp. 21-40.

83 Micheline Rice-Maximin, *Karukéra: Présence littéraire de la Guadeloupe* (New York, Peter Lang, 1998).

being overheard by the master or the overseers. One way in which they would achieve this was to code their speech in such a manner that a listener could not understand if s/he were not meant to. Therefore, one of the trends prominent in Caribbean literature is the need to camouflage meaning so that one must read beyond the apparent to uncover a multi-layered system. The grandmother is a primary figure in the continuation of this act of camouflage as she is an example of cultural resistance.[84] The grandmother holds this language and these stories and decides to whom they will be passed on.

Créole as a language form was used as a tool of resistance against a master who could not understand it. Often, as Glissant points out, creole folktales held a message that could only be decoded by those who were meant to understand. *Créole* phrases would then seem to mean one thing but might have a cloaked meaning, hidden from the listener. Edwidge Danticat's novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* provides an example of the use of *Créole* phrases to occlude meaning. When the character Sophie attacks the cane at the end of her mother's funeral, her grandmother and aunt cry out to her '*Ou Libéré*' which only they and those involved in the society and their family saga can understand. They ask Sophie if she is free, but the meaning goes much deeper than that. She has liberated herself from her enemy by attacking the cane.[85]

In brief, creole folktales are often ironic in nature or use subversion in order to move ahead. Benítez-Rojo argues a similar point: 'The Caribbean poem and novel are not only projects for ironizing a set of values taken as universal; they are also projects that communicate their own turbulence; [. . .] that is their own Otherness, their peripheral asymmetry with regard to the west'.[86] The plantation is the birth place of *Créole* language due to the need to deliver occluded messages that encouraged the listener to continue to resist oppression. Thus, it becomes obvious that the plantation is a point of origin of many aspects of Caribbean culture and literary imagination as it is known today.

As Glissant and Wilson-Tagoe have already argued, one cannot read West Indian literature without considering its historical context and, conversely, one

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84 See: Glissant (1996) and (1989); Chamoiseau and Confiant (1991).

85 See: Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (New York, Vintage, 1994)

86 Benítez-Rojo, op. cit., p. 27.

cannot read West Indian history without looking at the literature.[87] Therefore, the employment of social history in this space is essential to contextualise the literature. Western constructed history in this case has a great deal of baggage since for so long those who were born out of the plantation were denied an active role in the retelling of their history.[88] A great part of Caribbean literature is written, therefore, in response to an overwhelmingly negative depiction of the Caribbean experience (as could be argued of James Anthony Froude's *The English in the West Indies*) and to a denial of agency.[89] This is even more the case with Caribbean women and families because these groups were so marginalised by colonial discourse.[90] René Depestre points out the inseparable nature of writing and history. He thereby implicates history and its considerable involvement when reading Caribbean literature when he declares: *'la littérature haîtienne n'a jamais cessé de pratiquer le "bouche à bouche avec l'histoire'*.[91] This pronouncement illustrates how significantly history underpins Caribbean literary production. Benítez-Rojo sees the plantation as the cradle of historicity and cultural activity:

> [as][. . .] the womb of my otherness—and of my globality, if you will allow this word. It is the bifurcated center that exists inside and outside at the same time, near to and distant from all things that I can understand as my own: race, nationality, language, religion.[92]

The plantation is taken in this sense as a key point origin of the Caribbean literary imagination so that the issue of creolisation is thus foregrounded. This term has often been used to describe the culture as if it were a fixed form, but as Benítez-Rojo argues:

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87 See: Wilson-Tagoe (1998); Glissant (1989); See also Peter Childs and Patrick Williams discussion on Glissant's belief about history: *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* (London, Prentice Hall Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1997), particularly p. 47.

88 For discussions on this see: Toni Morrison, 'The Site of Memory', in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* ed. by, Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Cornel West (New York, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990).

89 James Anthony Froude, *The English in the West Indies or the Bow of Ulysses* (London, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1888).

90 See Chapter One for definition and discussion of Colonial Discourse.

91 Régis Antoine, *La Littérature franco-antillaise: Haïti, Guadeloupe et Martinique* (Paris, Katharla, 1992), p. 123.

92 Benítez-Rojo, 'Three Words Toward Creolization', in *Caribbean Creolization: Reflections on the Cultural Dynamics of Language, Literature, and Identity* ed. by Kathleen M. Balutansky and Marie-Agnès Sourieau, (Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 1998), p. 54.

> From my perspective, our cultural manifestations are not creolized, but rather in a state of creolization. Creolization does not transform literature or music or language into a synthesis or anything that could be taken in essentialist terms, nor does it lead these expressions into a predictable state of creolization. Rather, creolization is a term with which we attempt to explain the unstable states that a Caribbean cultural object presents over time.[93]

Creole in the Caribbean sense can be used to signify many different things. *Créole* is often used to refer specifically to the language spoken in Guadeloupe, Martinique and Haiti, for example. It is also used to refer to the other Creoles of the Spanish or English language in the Caribbean. *Criollo* used in the Cuban, Dominican, and Puerto Rican sense is anything or anyone created in the islands. On one level, during colonial days, this term was used to distinguish those Spaniards who were born on the island, the result of encounters between various cultures.[94] Creole is also used to refer to all that is created in the Caribbean. This sense is distinct from the signification placed on the word when employed as a descriptive term to describe Caribbean culture and cultural expression.

As Benítez-Rojo illustrates, the belief that the Caribbean is creole would imply a fixity that does not really exist. The term 'creole', therefore, should not govern the region, but rather the region should employ it to articulate its ever-changing multiplicity, for the cultural processes of the region become more plural by their combination and conflation with newer influences. This suggests, for example, that the Cuban novel written in exile will not be the same as that produced within Cuba as the author has taken an already creolised form and further creolised it so that it better articulates a further cultural multiplicity or creoleness.

The continued process of creolisation, as illustrated earlier, has a direct impact on the Caribbean grandmother and how she is depicted in literature because, as she constantly adjusts and adapts to meet the changing needs of her community and her family, an author's rendering of her must change. Also, with an author's exposure to various cultural influences, his/her perception will be altered. Therefore, the writer who leaves Cuba, for instance, may no longer regard his/her past history in the same way as the writer who stays behind, or even, as s/he might have done before leaving. The same could be said for a Barbadian writer who migrates to

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93 Benítez-Rojo, Ibid., p. 55.

94 See: Carolyn Allen, 'Creole Then and Now: The Problem of Definition', in *La huella étnica en la narrativa caribeña* ed. by Aura Marina Boadas y Mireya Fernández Merino, (Caracas, Asociación Venezolana de Estudios del Caribe, AVECA, 1999), pp. 27-50; Ellis Cashmore, *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations* 4th Ed. (New York, Routledge, 1996).

Canada. It is important to point out, therefore, that time and place change or affect one's ideas or concepts. Nevertheless, the rendering of the grandmother in so many Caribbean narrative works, in spite of generational differences, maintains a striking similarity.

Traditionally, a gendered distinction has played itself out, as will be seen, by grandmothers encouraging their male grandchildren to succeed in the wider world while they discourage their granddaughters from venturing too far from home. Often, this fosters the male's education rather than the female's. Perhaps this is due mostly to the rigid patriarchal system in place in the region. For this reason, reading texts by men and women concurrently involves a salient examination of gender implications and how they manifest themselves. Male writers often illustrate the privileges that their male characters receive, while women writers articulate the difficulties females have in asserting their individuality, even if they are perhaps more intelligent than the males. Some of these women also illustrate how the trend is changing, demonstrating how the grandmothers in their texts go against tradition, so far as it concerns a woman's place, to encourage their granddaughters' success.

This study illustrates how the grandmother remains within the homespace to raise her grandchildren, assuming responsibility for the family. She is, therefore, positioned in a highly influential place. Her seniority and knowledge give her a great deal of power and authority, if only in her home and her immediate community.

Explanation of Structure

To best demonstrate the repeating rhythm punctuated by the grandmother figure that crosses the Caribbean as does the music—fragmenting from country to country, from language to language, from Zouk to Calypso, from Salsa to Merengue—the thesis will be divided into four separate chapters. While the author realises that by dividing the works into their language groups, it once again seemingly re-imposes barriers between the various sections of the region, he asserts that this is perhaps the most efficient way for examining the similarity argued for without losing the specificity of the individual groups.

Because history is such a formative part of the thesis and is so deeply implicated in the writing process in the region, Chapter One explores the historical and theoretical aspects of the study. This chapter will contextualise the literary works within the social and historical texts that deal with myths of Caribbeanness and the past social reality. It will do this by presenting examples of historical accounts of Caribbean alterity and attempting to illustrate how the assumptions and misrepresentations came to be. It is essential for social-history to be discussed as it has such an impact on the structure of the community, which, in turn, affects the writer's life experiences and, thus, so her/his imagination and, ultimately, the literary reconstruction. The thesis will analyse the popular conceptions that govern Caribbean socio-historical representation such as that Caribbean women were passive workhorses and/or scarlet women, while still being domineering matriarchs within their home sphere.[95]

Historicising the moment would then shed light on the grandmother's deep involvement in the family and her continued appearance in literary renderings of family life. It shows the connection between the literary grandmothers who become the base on which their offspring rely. Those constructed in the memoirs and essays would illustrate the link between the historical and the literary as they pronounce a similarity of presence, illustrating how the lived experience is reconstructed as a character in a fictional world.

This chapter draws on theory to illustrate how myths have been perpetuated and how they can be subverted when reconsidered within the particular cultural context. It also provides a theoretical framework that allows for Caribbean cultural plurality and specificity as opposed to general western theories which once again

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95 See: Janet Momsen, 'Gender Roles in Caribbean Agricultural Labour', in *Caribbean Freedom: Economy and Society from Emancipation to the Present* ed. by Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (London, James Currey, 1996), pp. 216-225.

subsume Caribbean literature, the West Indian writer, and the Antillean literary subject. It will ultimately link the Anglophone, Hispanophone, and Francophone region illustrating that they went through historically and sociologically similar periods which lead in part to their commonality. It will also point out the distinctions that exist between the regions, necessitating a closer reading of each political and language group as a fragmented part of the whole.

While Martinique and Guadeloupe are indisputably French and are in no way independent and must therefore be considered as individuals, separated from the rest of the region, it is also essential to move beyond this surface difference to illustrate that similar themes do still surface in spite of political dependence or independence. The Cuban-exile experience also speaks for a particular historical moment which separates the writing from some of the Anglophone experience. This would necessitate a deeper understanding of the political and social conditions that surround the literary reproduction.

Chapter Two focuses on the Anglophone Caribbean and the importance of homeplace and homespace in texts by Zee Edgell, Alvin Bennett, and Cecil Foster where the grandmother is head. This chapter uses the theories of homespace as a safe female-centred space, drawing from Carole Boyce Davies, bell hooks, Rosemary Marangoly George, and to a limited extent, Homi Bhabha.[96] The chapter illustrates how grandmothers seek to raise their grandchildren as best they can in the face of great adversity. It also focuses on how the outside world often conspires against the characters' efforts to succeed. Furthermore, it is within this space that the grandmother is the head of the house and the authority figure in the family. Homespace as a slot fought for, or in the Caribbean sense a 'scotch', a term used to signify the making of space, particularly where it is at a premium, (or to wedge in), and often signalling the temporary nature of home, is important here.[97] Homespace is wedged in under the shadow of the master's house, and usually on his land, which is rented from him. The home is therefore a safe space which has been seized and developed by the dwellers within a hostile area. Arguably, therefore, by locating themselves within their homespace, teaching resistance to their grandchildren, and relying on traditional networks and marginal religious practices, grandmothers

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[96] See: Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (New York, Routledge, 1994); bell hooks, *Yearning, Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990); Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* (New York, Cambridge UP, 1996); Homi K. Bhabha, 'Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the margins of the modern nation' *The Location of Culture* (London, Routledge, 1994), pp. 139-170.

[97] For definition and usage of 'Scotch' see: Richard Allsopp, *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (Oxford, Oxford UP, 1996), pp. 491-492.

re-form and refute Gayatri Spivak's closure on the subaltern, when she concludes by stating that the subaltern is silent.[98]

Chapter Three examines Cristina García's and Pablo Medina's writing on the role of the grandmother in Cuban exile literature. The chapter centres on the spiritual link that the grandmother provides between home and her grandchildren. It illustrates how the grandmother grounds her offspring in a sense of self, giving them an identity and the tools with which they can move forward in their lives. It explores the salient link between the grandmothers and spiritual awakening, and also between spirituality and the grandmothers' attempts to educate their grandchildren to their traditions. One of Medina's works, *Exiled Memories*, creates an interesting dynamic in this study, as it is not a novel but rather an essay or book of essays that he asserts are based on truth.

Chapter Four examines homespace and place in works by Simone Schwarz-Bart and Joseph Zobel. The chapter studies homespace and homeplace from the perspective of the exploration of female ancestral links as embodied by the grandmothers. It employs *Leonora* by Dany Bébel-Gisler as a secondary text to show the range of events and the similarities between the novel and the events occurring at that time. It also discusses the healing arts that these grandmothers hold as a part of their ancestral knowledge and they pass these on to their grandchildren.

The combination and conflation of the texts discussed in these chapters seek to show that the grandmother archetype sets up a rhythm which blurs boundaries as it repeats across time and space. She is a primary character due to specific socio-historical and cultural factors and historical moments which transform her into repetitive polyrhythm. As the rhythm flows from one island to another, from one language across the waves to another language, it maintains its individuality or cultural specificity, while pronouncing a shared history or origin in the plantation rooted in Africa and Europe.

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98 See: Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak'?, in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* ed. by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, (New York, Columbia UP, 1994), pp. 66-111; Also see: Myriam J. A. Chancy, *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 1997), particularly 'Chapter 1: Nou Là!: Haitian Feminism as the Crossroads Politics of Theory and Action', pp. 24-45.

Chapter One:
Deconstructing the Myth, Mapping a Field:
History and Caribbean Alterity

> [W]hether, by proper cultivation, and a regular course of tuition at school and the university, a Negro might not be found as capable of literature as a white person. 1

> Evidently they belonged to a race far inferior to the Zulus and Caffres, whom I had known in South Africa. They were more coarsely formed in limb and feature. They would have been slaves in their own country if they had not been brought to ours, and at the worst had lost nothing in the change.[...]
> Morals in the technical sense they have none, but they cannot be said to sin, because they have no knowledge of a law, and therefore they can commit no breach of the law. They are naked and not ashamed. They are *married* as they call it, but not *parsoned*. The woman prefers a looser tie that she may be able to leave a man if he treats her unkindly.2

> What are striking in these discourses are the rhetorical figures one keeps encountering in their descriptions of "the mysterious East", as well as the stereotypes about the African [or Indian or Irish or Jamaican or Chinese] mind", the notions about bringing civilization to primitive or barbaric peoples, the disturbingly familiar ideas about flogging or death or extended punishment being required when "they" misbehaved or became rebellious, because "they" mainly understood force or violence best; "they" were not like "us", and for that reason deserved to be ruled.3

Although separated by approximately 100 years, the accounts of James Anthony Froude (1888) and Edward Long (1774) illustrate that even as time progressed, the 'Negro' was still viewed as being inferior or savage. Long proposes to experiment with education to see whether an educated 'Negro' may not be as 'capable [...] as a white person'.[4] Ultimately, however, he concludes that this capacity or test seems an impossible occurrence. Most readers of such an account would probably not, at the time, have seen these observations as culturally specific or culturally chauvinistic or racially motivated. The assumption, from lack of information and experience with the subject, would have been that it was a natural matter of inferiority and superiority, the white person being superior to the black by nature.

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1 Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica, or General Survey of the Ancient and Modern State of the Island* (Origin pub. 1774), (London, New York, reprint Arno Press, 1972), vol. 2, book 3 chapter 3, p 476.

2 James Anthony Froude, *The English in the West Indies or The Bow of Ulysses* (London, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1888), pp. 42-43

3 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, Vintage, 1993), p. xi.

4 Long, Ibid.

Edward Said's critique of cultural imperialism in *Culture and Imperialism* illustrates how images similar to Long's and Froude's were instrumental in establishing the binary between 'us' and 'them' and facilitating the concept of the need to civilise the savages, and also the paternalism and altruism involved in this civilising project. These issues are of utmost importance when considering how to read Caribbean history and literature in an attempt to trace the stories that show how the grandmother in Caribbean culture has taken on a primary role within the area and has consequently become a literary character of great importance.

This chapter examines history and its role in the construction of an identity for black and mulatto women in the Caribbean. It suggests that although images of Caribbean women—black, mulatto, Indian, white, creole—have changed over the centuries, they remain ones of difference and distinction. It begins by showing how blacks have been viewed in general, looking at how racism, slavery, colonialism, imperialism, expansionism, have all affected the images constructed and perceptions of difference and how discourses have been altered over the centuries to reflect these changes.

The Caribbean grandmother figure holds the community together in her efforts to counter negative assertions and, insofar as she can, liberates her offspring from further objectification. She thereby becomes indelibly inscribed on their memory and in their unconscious mind.

To begin a discussion on the deconstruction of a mythical image that has been generated for centuries one must first postulate how that mythical image was formed. Deconstruction is used here as Robert Young defines it:

> If one had to answer, therefore, the general question of what is deconstruction a deconstruction of, the answer would be, of the concept, the authority, and the assumed primacy of, the category of "the West".[5]

This chapter uses deconstruction to examine the 'Western' concept of the Caribbean woman and question its authority and primacy in her stereotyping. Meanwhile, it offers self-reflexive images of Caribbean womanhood, particularly as they relate to the grandmother.

This chapter proposes to examine several aspects of Caribbean society and ultimately representations of Caribbean women. It firstly engages with the historical context and representation as it moves from Edward Long through the years to Mrs.

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5 Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing, History and the West* (London, Routledge, 1990), p. 19.

Carmichael.[6] It argues that while these proponents of slavery wrote at different times, and their writings engaged with the philosophical shifts that occurred during these years, their ideals of slavery and of differences between blacks and whites remained similar. It does not pretend to embark upon any new or previously un-trod terrain. It does, however, argue that by reading historical accounts that spanned hundreds of years there becomes a clearly visible thread that conjoins historical accounts and creates discursive representations of what race was perceived to be.

Secondly, by examining interconnected historical accounts with a view to illuminating how they created a monochromatic image of black mulattos and other nonwhite Caribbean women, it suggests that there was a link to colonial discourse that insisted on these bodies being viewed as inferior and therefore subject to control and white male patriarchal power. It also recognises, though, that the image of the 'Other' is not a monolithic image. It is an image that has been constructed differently by each colonising body. Similarly, the image of the black man and the black woman were constructed separately. So, images of the Caribbean male of African descent and the Caribbean woman of African descent were constructed with different objectives in mind and therefore reflect them as different people.

Thirdly, the chapter draws on time-specific information to illustrate that while the planters and abolitionists may have disagreed on the issue of slavery, they did agree on the necessity of keeping the enslaved/former enslaved at a cultural distance by focusing on their difference. Shifts in language and images took place, and these alterations by various groups also illustrate that as these images changed so did the image the writers and policy makers had of themselves, and, therefore, the image of what they perceived to be the 'West'.[7]

Fourthly, the chapter draws on more recent re-examinations of historical data which unpack the language of empire and by so doing engage with the arguments being undertaken to continually maintain the status quo of the Caribbean individual as obviously 'Other' and thereby exploitable.[8] In the process, it concentrates on

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6 Mrs. Carmichael, Domestic Manners and Social Condition of the White, Coloured and Negro Population of the West Indies 2 Vols. (New York, Negro University Press, 1833). Mrs. Carmichael was one of the major pro-slavery advocates and held similar beliefs to Long in the 'Negro's' inherent inferiority.

7 See: Edward W. Said, Orientalism (New York, Vintage, 1978); Also, this is not to imply that the 'West' or Europe were monolithic. These philosophically 'superior' groups are as diverse and culturally heterogeneous as are the various peoples from Africa. Also, the 'West' as a concept only came into being in the 19th century, up until which time, there were certainly schisms (as there still are).

8 More recent is used to refer to work done in the last twenty years by researchers like Verene Shepherd, Hilary McD Beckles, Bridget Brereton, Barbara Bush and Janet Momsen, among others, who have worked to uncover gender specifications involved in Caribbean history and slave representation.

those who re-read history and on the gender constructs of historical discourse. In so doing, it articulates a trend in the overlooking of gendered differences which allowed non-white women to be exploited during and after slavery in various ways. Also, it sees the distinction between the representation of mulatto women and black women born in the Caribbean and black women imported directly from Africa. These images of female alterity were then adopted ultimately as stereotypes that were penned into literary texts of empire and thereby continued to perpetuate the empirical discourse at home and abroad either wittingly or unwittingly.

Fifthly, it argues that some Caribbean prose writers and historians like Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Hilary Beckles, Orlando Patterson, along with cultural anthropologists and sociologists such as Erna Brodber and Bridget Brereton, offer images of the Caribbean woman that engage with the former stereotypes, and attempt to dismantle their authority by questioning their validity in the face of a more culturally truthful, or sensitive, representation.[9] The chapter proposes then to demonstrate that these writers illustrate the resistance of their characters that were shown as complicitous in their own enslavement by the colonial accounts and subverts that by illustrating the duplicitous nature of such seeming acceptance of enslavement and marginality, while establishing a formidable reality of resistance, tacit or active.

The autobiographical works and essays by Caribbean authors attest to a link between the grandmother in a social historical context or reality and that constructed in the literary works examined in this thesis. The thesis also seeks to provide a cultural or historical context for the writers to discuss how their writing might articulate themes that would have been pertinent at that time due to significant social and historical events or moments. The works drawn on in this section will be Pablo Medina's *Exiled Memories*, Virgil Suárez's *Spared Angola*, Flor Fernández Barrios's *Blessed by Thunder*, and *Leonora: The Buried Story of Guadeloupe* by Dany Bébel-Gisler, as well as interviews given by the writers themselves.[10]

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[9] See, for example: Edward Kamau Brathwaite, The Devkeopment of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820 (Oxford, Oxford UP, 1971); Hilary McD Beckles, Centering Woman: Gender Discourse in Caribbean Slave Society (Kingston, Ian Randle, 1999); Bridget Brereton, 'Searching for the Invisible Woman', in Slavery and Abolition. Vol. 13. No. 2. August 1992;Barbara Bush, Slave Woman in Caribbean Society 1650-1838 (Lodon, James Currey Press, 1990); Janet H. Momsen, ed. Women and Change in the Caribbean (London, James Currey Press, 1993); Erna Brodber, Perceptions of Caribbean Women: Towards a Documentation of Stereotypes (Bridgetown, Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1982).

[10] Pablo Medina, Exiled Memories: A Cuban Childhood (Austin, Texas UP, 1990); Virgil Suárez, Spared Angola: Memories from a Cuban-American Childhood (Houston, Arte Público, 1997); Flor Fernández Barrio, Blessed by Thunder: Memoir of a Cuban Girlhood (Seattle, Seal Press, 2000); Danny Bébel-Gisler, Leonora: The Buried Story of Guadeloupe (Charlottesville, University of Virginia, (1985) translation 1994)

It is important to examine the distinctions made between constructs of black women, mulatto women and white women, as they exist in counter distinction to one another in the Caribbean. The manner race was perceived in the 17th century has changed from the way it was perceived and constructed in the 19th century, at the end of slavery. The words of David Hume, illustrate how the shift to linearity between culture and colour are significant. The 'Negro' at the time he is to be given freedom from shackles, is once again constructed as inferior, but on another basis. It is also important to point out here the extremely gender specific nature of the language of this period. Most of the earlier referents would have referred to the 'Negro' as male and this masculinity of language, unless otherwise specified, is a result of the times. The change to a more gender-sensitive language would only occur much later. Therefore this chapter will employ the gender specificity of the language throughout the early period which includes, for example, Froude, Long and Hume. Hume argues that:

> I am apt to suspect that the Negroes, and in general all other species of men [...] to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilised nation of any other complexion than the whites.[11]

It is important to establish an argument that illustrates the connection between the alterity of non-white women in the Caribbean and those from beyond the region's boundaries. A poignant link exists between systems as organised for non-nuclear familial ties and those established in European countries where men were seen as the head of the household, for the most part. This family structure, where the older woman is in charge of the household continues today, although it may owe itself largely to an African cultural link. Disintegration of the so-called family during slavery may also influence this structure. The woman-headed household is evidenced in some Caribbean families as late as the end of the twentieth century. The patterns may change, depending on cultural epochs and environmental influences, but the trend is apparently long-lasting.

Historical Representations

This section focuses on the marginalisation of the Caribbean woman and the problems inherent therein. Within this context, 'Caribbean woman' is used to refer to

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11 David Hume, addition of footnote to the 1753-54 edition of "National Characteristics", T.H. Green and T.H. Grose (eds.) Essays, Moral, Political and Literary (London, 1889).

a group that is extremely heterogeneous, as it embodies blacks, mulattos, Asians, creole/white, East Indians, indigenous women, French-Creoles, Portuguese, Hispanics, and others. There exist vast divides between the realities lived by these groups, hence the focus is more on the experiences of the black, mulatto and creole/white women. Each group will have specific experiences of oppression and sexual exploitation and enslavement. It is also important to point out that black women, as in those imported directly from Africa, would have suffered a different kind of exploitation to that suffered by mulatto women because of the latter's position of relative superiority within the plantation hierarchy due to her increased desirability in the slave masters' eyes.[12] Fully black/African women were more liable to be severely exploited than mulatto women.

Quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Edward Long argues that there was a test to see whether a 'Negro' could become more like a white man, in spite of his black skin.[13] This transformation would entail the 'Negro's' loss of his savage aspect and his becoming civilised. Long, though, continues his criticism of the 'Negroes' saying:

> In general, they are void of genius, and seem almost incapable of making any progress in civility or science. They have no plan or system of morality among them. Their barbarity to their children debases their nature even below that of brutes. They have no moral sensations; no taste but for women; gormandising, and drinking to excess; no wish but to be idle.[14]

From this description, then, Long's ideal has a dim hope of success. He focuses on the inferiority of the race so that it becomes understandable that an audience in Europe might visualise these individuals as savages and those who write about them as heroes. Discussing Africa and its connection with the people he condemns, he offers that:

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12 For more information on the black woman's desirebility in the master's eyes see: Alice Walker, 'Coming Apart', in You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down (San Diego, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovitch, 1983); Barbara Bush, Slave Woman in Caribbean Society; Lola Young, 'A Nasty Piece of Work: A Spychoanalytic Study of Sexual and Racial Difference in "Mona Lisa"', in Identity-Community, Difference ed. by J. Rutherford (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), p. 195; bell hooks, Black Looks: Race and Representation (Boston, South End Press, 1992).

13 The language is masculine here, as it is in Long, Froude's and other accounts of the time. The masculine is used to refer to the whole, except when women are explicitly spoken of or described.

14 Long, (1972), op. cit., p. 353.

> Whatever great personages this country might anciently have produced, and concerning whom we have no information, they are now every where degenerated into a brutish, ignorant, idle, crafty, treacherous, bloody, thievish, mistrustful, and superstitious people.[15]

Once again, they are ultimately the dregs of humanity and Long insists that these 'Negroes' are far removed from the humanity that is European. Therefore, there can be no glimmer of hope for their salvation. He considers their alterity obvious due to their physical appearance.

> A covering of wool, like the bestial fleece, instead of hair [. . .] The roundness of their eyes, the figure of their ears, tumid nostrils, flat noses, invariable thick lips, and general large size of the female nipples, as if adapted by nature to the peculiar conformation of their children's mouths.[16]

Long continues to condemn them, focusing on their 'noxious odour', and the fact that they never change colour from their black hue, in spite of years spent in colder climates, not exposed to the sun. All of these factors conflate to ensure that the 'Negroes' are viewed as non-human, of another race and therefore contemptible and so, only fit for the category of slave.[17] They are similar to apes. In her 1833 publication Mrs. Carmichael, another proponent of slavery, observes:

> Many negro men, of good character otherwise have two or more wives; and strange to tell, these wives live on good terms with each other; they often make friendly visits to each other; but there is always one favourite for the time being, and it often happens that this same wife has been the favourite for fifteen or twenty years. There is no jealousy on her part, so long as matters are openly conducted; but all intrigues are disliked, and are a frequent cause of quarrels.[18]

While Mrs. Carmichael's perspective does not appear as hostile toward the 'Negro' as others have been, it is nonetheless reinforcing an already existent dichotomy between European and 'Negro'. No mention is made of masters who might have been

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15 Ibid., p. 354

16 Long, op. cit., p. 352.

17 'Negro' is employed here in the historic context as used by Long and others. It has become an extremely offensive term in present usage and is, therefore, not used as such.

18 Mrs. Carmichael, *Domestic Manners and Social Condition of the White, Coloured and Negro Population of the West Indies* 2 Vols. (New York, Negro University Press, 1833), Vol. 1, p. 298.

participating in a similar set of activities as those 'Negro' men. Worse yet, the 'Negro' women accept this situation and are friends. One can infer that European women would never do this. Her observations on the intrigues permit one to assume that they are many and often. These descriptions are a part of the reductive discourse of colonialism and paternalism as regards the Caribbean during and immediately post slavery.

Fifty years after Mrs Carmichael and a century after Long, Froude insists that 'There is immorality, but an immorality which is not demoralising. There is sin, but it is the sin of animals, without shame, because there is no sense of doing wrong'.[19] This description taken in tandem with Long's desire for the 'Negro' to become what Franz Fanon refers to as, an educated black skin, white mask, illustrates how the theories of alterity and therefore the reality of marginalisation, exploitation and erasure could easily become practice.[20] As the 'Negroes' are compared to animals they are said not to know any better. If they were human then there would be a problem with them being treated inhumanely. But, because Froude and others like him focus on the black's lack of humanity, they are not expected to measure up to the moral standards of white Europeans, in this instance the English.

Consequent to all his observations about the condition of the 'Negro' in the West Indies, Froude confirms that:

> These poor children of darkness have escaped the consequence of the Fall, and must come from another stock after all. Meanwhile they are perfectly happy. In no part of the globe is there any peasantry whose every want is so completely satisfied as her Majesty's black subjects in the West Indian Islands [. . .] They have perfect liberty, and are safe from dangers to which if left to themselves they would be exposed, for the English rule prevents the strong from oppressing the weak.[21]

Froude's paternalism is stark. But the strong are certainly oppressing the weak in this instance, albeit paternalistically, as Froude sees it. According to him, the 'Negro' could do no better than to be a slave or an indentured labourer in one of her majesty's colonies. As animals or children they are unlikely to survive in the

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19 Froude op. cit., p. 43.

20 Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* trans. by Constance Farrington. (New York, Grove Press, 1967).

21 Froude, op. cit., pp. 43-44.

'wilds'.[22] Therefore, incarceration, of this kind, is preferable. In Thomas Tryon's 'Friendly Advice to the Gentlemen-Planters of the East and West Indies' the slave answers the master's request for him to perform with:

> *Boon Master!* If you have me Dance upon mine Head, or Caper on the top of the House, I must do it, though I break my Neck; for you are become Lord both of my *feet*, and every part of me'.[23]

This point illustrates that the enslaved does not even own himself. He is not master of his own body. The idea of his having a free will to perform what tasks he would at his leisure is displaced. From all accounts then, nothing more can be expected from the African slaves, as they are not genetically able to be any more than inferior savages. Long, after his experiment to 'whiten' a black savage, realises that in the final analysis:

> it is really astonishing to find, that these causes have not operated to their civilization; they are at this day, if any credit can be given to the most modern accounts, but little divested of their primitive brutality; we cannot pronounce them insusceptible of civilization, since even apes have been taught to eat, drink, repose, and dress, like men; but of all the human species hitherto discovered, their natural baseness of mind seems to afford least hope of their being [. . .] so far refined as to *think*.[24]

Long concludes that the 'Negro' is incapable of thinking. Therefore, he is not human, as the adage 'I think, therefore, I am' renders him as subhuman. He is incapable of raising himself out of his miserable state, even with the support of the white European who tries to open his eyes to the error of his ways and to educate him in the art of civility. He is worse than an ape. Such images allowed the colonisers to deploy their mechanisms of racism and alterity by illustrating the accuracy of their claims of Caribbean people in general and women in particular being beasts of burden.

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22 Ibid.

23 Thomas Tryon, 'Friendly Advice to the Gentlemen-Planters of the East and West Indies', in *Caribbeana: An Anthology of English Literature of the West Indies 1657-1777* ed. by Thomas W. Krise (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 52.

24 Long (1972), op. cit., pp. 376-377.

The 'Beginning' of Caribbean History

Arguably, the Caribbean began in 1492 with Columbus's discovery of the islands. This assumption, however, supposes the non-existence of a history prior to Columbus's intervention. It is precisely when Columbus commenced his colonising project that the tools of representation began to operate on a surface level to control the images disseminated of the reality encountered in the West Indies. Peter Hulme's *Colonial Encounters* examines early accounts of the native or indigenous people in the region which posits them as less than 'civilised Europeans'.[25] The readers of these accounts had no other authority on which to rely than those individuals who reproduced images of the native Caribbean for their own purposes. This trend of representation continued, changing and adjusting to fit the reality that it was describing and the philosophy of the times. So, for example, while slavery was a new and important aspect of the Caribbean world, writers such as Edward Long described those who were enslaved as being less than human. Later writers continued the thread of representation but employed different techniques which allowed the images and discourses to fall in line with more liberatory beliefs that emerged later during slavery, while maintaining the general inferiority of the 'Other' and the need to keep him or her separated from the European individual. Each writer, therefore, described the Caribbean in a manner that was fitting for his or her time.

The discovery of the Caribbean was also synonymous with the rapid disappearance of the Arawak Indians, one of the indigenous inhabitants of the islands when Columbus arrived. After Columbus, the island of Hispaniola provided the Caribbean with the first sugar cane plantation in the early 1500s. Sugar would from then on play a major role in West Indian society. According to Eric Williams, sugar cane production soon spread from Hispaniola to Cuba, Puerto Rico and Jamaica, and so, by the late 1520s sugar production was hugely important in the economies of these colonies of England and Spain.[26] However, the hard labour and European diseases to which the Indians were exposed resulted in their eventual and virtual disappearance. Therefore, by 1570, Williams observes that there were only

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25 Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the native Caribbean 1492-1797* (London, Routledge, 1986).

26 Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean* (1970) (New York, Vintage, 1984), p. 27.

two villages of indigenous people left.[27] Bartolomé de las Casas strove for the protection of the Indians from extinction, but his efforts proved fruitless. Williams points out that Las Casas 'accepted the solution proposed by the Dominican monks in an approach to the King in 1511, to the effect that, "as the labour of one Negro was more valuable than that of four Indians, every effort should be made to bring to Hispaniola many Negroes from Cuinea". The rationalisation of Negro slavery and the Negro slave trade had begun'.[28] White slaves were made available to the West Indian colonies in 1504 and again in 1512 by the Spanish Crown.[29] Labour was of utmost importance to the continued success of the West Indian colonies and their sugar cane production. It was, therefore, no surprise that in 1501, blacks, recently converted to Christianity were transported from Spain. So, as Williams points out: 'The Spanish slave trade thus began not as a trade from West Africa to the West Indies [the Portuguese already held the monopoly on Guinea slave trade], but from Spain, and it thus excluded all non-Christian slaves and Christian slaves born in the power of non-Spaniards'.[30]

Sugar production and the necessary slave labour developed across the West Indies and spurred conflicts between the European powers who did not feel that Spain should have the monopoly in the Wet Indies and wanted a fair share in the profits. Barbados became the jewel of the British colonies as its production was so much higher than that of the other islands.[31] It then became the foremost of all the West Indies colonies and maintained this lead through to the seventeenth century.[32] This development in sugar cane production meant more exploitative labour practices and more exploitable labourers; hence the growth of African slavery. As Orlando Patterson declares: 'Slavery, for the slave, was truly a "trial by death," as Hegel called it. Out of this trial the slave emerged, if he survived at all. . '.[33] Each language

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27 Ibid., p. 37.

28 Ibid., p. 37.

29 Ibid., p. 38.

30 Ibid., p. 43.

31 Ibid., pp. 112-113.

32 Ibid., pp. 113-115.

33 Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1982), p. 100.

region or colonised space in the Caribbean had its own number of slaves and requirements for slave labour. Each also made agreements on how many slaves were to be imported to the region, from where and by whom, for how long, how often, and at what cost.[34] Of course, this all came to an eventual end in the nineteenth century with the abolition of slavery. As Williams states:

> The slave trade, abolished finally by Denmark in 1803, was abolished by Great Britain in 1807. Restored by Bonaparte in 1802, it was abolished by the French Government in 1817. In the same year the Spanish government signed a treaty with Great Britain whereby it pledged itself to abolition in 1820. Holland proclaimed abolition in 1818, Sweden in 1824. Slavery was abolished in the British colonies in 1833. Sweden followed suit in 1846, France in 1848, Holland in 1863. Slavery was abolished in Puerto Rico in 1873 and in Cuba in 1880.[35]

As is well known, however, abolition did not automatically mean that the former enslaved were free to live their lives as they chose. It also does not suppose that there was a drastic change in morality which allowed for or insisted upon abolition. Abolition was more a result of a combination of a number of factors. Eric Williams breaks these factors down into five distinct, but certainly related groups: 'the economic factors; the political factors; the humanitarian agitation; international and intercolonial rivalry; the social factors'.[36] There was, as was to be expected, however, resistance to abolition, particularly from some of the planters whose assets and wealth were inextricably tied up in the slave industry. One factor was of great importance though, slavery no longer provided the metropolitan centres the revenues they relied on. So, it became less of a primary force in the metropolitans' economic gain. Similarly, slavery began to become too costly an endeavour to continue. A new, cheaper way of producing sugar, rum and other products needed to be found.[37] 'Free labour' also provided a more economic answer to the expenses of slavery.[38]

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34 For more information on this see: Williams op. cit., Chapter Ten 'Capitalism and Slavery', pp. 136-155.

35 Williams op. cit., p. 280.

36 Ibid., p. 280.

37 For more details on economic reasons for abolition see: Williams op. cit., pp. 280-292.

38 Williams op. cit., p. 290.

The political factors were more or less divisible into those managed by the metropole and those controlled in the colonies themselves. The political factors of the former were many and began in France with the 1789 French Revolution and culminated with the Spanish Revolution's deposal of the monarchy in 1868.[39] Meanwhile, the colonies were growing in their political awareness and desire to be independent of their colonising masters, and saw slavery as an extension of colonial control. Once again, it should perhaps be stressed that, while these efforts were underway, there were still clear distinctions made in the colonies themselves between whites, mulattoes, free Negroes, and slaves, though, the primary concern was to liberate themselves from European control which therefore allowed for a solidarity of sorts to develop between the divergent groups. However, abolitionists still had to convince planters of the benefits of liberating their slaves and reassure them that it was not economic suicide.

What Williams refers to as the Humanitarian agitation, was the political and social activism of the groups which became known as the abolitionists. He offers that:

> The humanitarian agitation for the abolition of the slave system is associated particularly with the names of Clarkson, Wilberforce and Fowell Buxton in England, and of Victor Schoelcher in France. It was responsible for two aspects of the abolition struggle(the view that the slave trade was inhuman and its abolition a triumph of humanitarianism, and the policy that emancipation of the slaves must be gradual.[40]

Abolition or Emancipation under this guise is arguably one of the more contentious areas of slavery and post-slavery discussions as so many ambiguities exist as to the full impact and importance of the abolitionists' moves to emancipate the enslaved peoples. Although the abolitionists may have been fighting for the liberation of the enslaved blacks, they were not an homogeneous group nor did they create a monolithic discourse on the ways to achieve, and goals for, emancipation. Also, they were not arguing for the black race's ultimate human equality with the white race. Also worthy of note is that there was always a clear distinction maintained between abolition and emancipation and what they meant, and how each would be enacted. As Williams illustrates: 'It was not until 1823 that the abolitionists

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39 Williams op. cit., p. 292.

40 Ibid., p. 295.

adopted the policy of emancipation'.[41] The gradual realisation which emancipation was meant to take is also described by Buxton, who is quoted as saying:

> "Nothing rash, nothing rapid, nothing abrupt, nothing bearing any feature of violence . . . (slavery) will subside; it will decline; it will expire; it will, as it were, burn itself down into its socket and go out . . . We shall leave it gently to decay(slowly, almost imperceptibly to die away and to be forgotten".[42]

Abolition thereby lent to emancipation which did in effect take on a gradual nature although this led to a great many complications and problems as time progressed. One major and almost insurmountable problem after abolition was the dwindling numbers of enslaved blacks. This was further compounded after emancipation.

In spite of efforts to 'encourage' the blacks to continue to work the same fields in which they had once slaved, even after emancipation, the labour force dwindled to the point that a new source of labour had to be found. The consequence was Asian indentureship which began in 1838, just after emancipation, and ended in 1924.[43] The post-emancipation indentured labourers provided what was argued to be free labour, in that they were not enslaved and could return to their homes upon completion of their contract.[44] Most, however, did not return. And even though they might have been 'free' there was still a degree of servitude in the relationship between themselves and the persons overseeing their work.

While numerous changes were occurring, the former enslaved persons were leaving the plantations where they had laboured and often took refuge in the mountains where they were able to farm their own land. Also, because of the post-emancipation migrations, freed women of colour found it necessary to work that much harder in the wake of what was termed male-out-migration.[45] This trend meant that many men left their families and communities in order to find work in the

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41 Ibid., p. 297.

42 Quoted in Williams op. cit., p. 297.

43 Williams op. cit., p. 348.

44 For more details on indentureship and discussion on its cultural and ethnic diversity see: Williams op. cit., 'Chapter Nineteen: Asian Immigration', pp.347-360.

45 For more details on male-out-migration see for example: Verne Shepherd, *Engendering History;* Janet Momsen, 'Gender Roles in Caribbean Agricultural Development', in *Caribbean Freedom* op. cit., pp. 216-225; Olive Senior, *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-speaking Caribbean* (London, James Currey, 1991).

wider world, thus, leaving behind single women and their children, this further encouraged women to become heads of households.

It is somewhat evident, therefore, that emigrations and migrations in search of employment, originally mostly male dominated also impacted on the family. Moreover, Janet Momsen also argues for women's productivity during earlier periods in this century and how women have also recently become more mobile. This would lead to a new socio-cultural dynamic. Momsen observes that:

> Both reproduction and production have been influenced by migration. During periods of high male out-migration, as in the early years of this century, women were forced to move back into the labour force. Today, many women are migrating overseas independently as well as with their families and some Caribbean countries have more female than male emigrants. Women migrants to North America and Europe enter into professional, though poorly paid, jobs such as nursing, while migrant West Indian men tend to be concentrated in unskilled or semi-skilled work. Women migrants also retain their ties with their families in the Caribbean more so than men and are more likely to send remittances, especially if they have left children to be raised by relatives in their natal country.[46]

As Momsen underlines, in the post-emancipation period there was a great deal of male-out-migration, which exacerbated the already matrifocal or matriarchal nature of many Caribbean families.[47] For example, many men moved to Panama during the construction of the canal because of the economic hardship after slavery and the fact that local economies were in a decline.[48] The canal project offered them the opportunity to earn American dollars and to thereby increase their wage by approximately tenfold. Some of those who left returned, but many others remained in Panama or simply never went back, again highlighting Momsen's observations.

These factors, combined with the later women's migrations, would lead to a unique family structure. The grandmother, therefore, would become an almost indispensable part of Caribbean culture, as she would often be the figure who remained in the wake of these cultural adaptations.

As Orlando Patterson states at the beginning of *Slavery and Social Death*:

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46 Momsen op. cit., p. 82.

47 For discussion on the Panama Canal see: Senior (1991), op. cit., p. 108.

48 Momsen (1993).

> All human relationships are structured and defined by the relative power of the interacting persons. Power, in Max Weber's terms, is " that opportunity existing within a social relationship which permits one to carry out one's will even against resistance and regardless of the basis on which this opportunity rests". Relations of inequality or domination, which exist wherever one person has more power than another, range on a continuum from those of marginal asymmetry to those in which one person is capable of exercising, with impunity, total power over another'.[49]

He goes on to say that: 'Slavery is one of the most extreme forms of the relation of domination, approaching the limits of total power from the viewpoint of the master, and of total powerlessness from the viewpoint of the slave'.[50]

Women's Roles in Slavery

Women were given a different role under slavery. Planters and abolitionists saw distorted pictures of Caribbean women. Moreover, black women constituted a sizeable portion of the labour force during and after slavery,[51] and were in that way forced to fulfil the role that Bush calls passive workhorses, one of the stereotypes planters held of them. Perhaps the fact that women often far outnumbered men aided in this stereotype's construction. According to Momsen:

> [T]he overall proportion of women slaves on Worthy Park plantation "rose from 46 to 60%, their numbers in the fields increased almost proportionately: from around 58% of the "field" labour force in the 1790s, to over 65% throughout the 1830s". As early as 1756 on Roaring River Estate in Jamaica of the ninety-two female slaves, seventy were field workers, while of the eighty-four men only twenty-eight were labouring in the cane fields.[52]

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49 Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1982), p. 1.

50 Ibid.

51 See: Janet Momsen, 'Gender Roles in Caribbean Agricultural Labour', in *Caribbean Freedom* op. cit., pp. 216-225.

52 Momsen (1996), op. cit., p.217, Momsen citing Sheridon, 1974, *Sugar and Slavery*, pp. 257-258.

This illustrates that women did indeed play a very large role in slave labour, particularly 'hard labour'. Moreover, children did not escape from this enclosure as enslaved women's children were automatically slaves. Momsen points this out:

> From the age of four years children were expected to work in the fields and [. . .] the gender divisions of labour of the parents were visited on the children. In 1787, 73% of the active slaves at Codrington were field labourers of which over half were women and young girls. Of the working child slaves 95% of the girls but only 80% of the boys were field hands.[53]

Children, therefore, did not escape the torture their parents experienced. Still, planters often denied the true role played by women on their plantations. This demonstrates that at the same time as employing these women in the same labours as men, the planters chose to down-play this and thus the importance of women in their labour force. Momsen states:

> The numerical dominance of women in the slave labour force had a marked effect on the gender division of labour. Yet the planters generally refused to recognize the existence of a high female sex ratio and Bush feels that this may have been done in order to conceal from the abolitionists the degree to which women slaves were exploited.[54]

This would be due to an effort to avoid criticism from the abolitionists. With changing trends in England, more emphasis was placed on women's femininity. With the imposed Victorian model, they became far more subordinate to their husbands. The juncture between life in England and life in the colonies is evidenced once again when Momsen illustrates how the English colonies followed a trend that began in England, toward women being taken out of the workforce. She states:

> These developments have been identified with Victorian morality and new middle class assumptions about the role of women. By the mid-nineteenth century such metropolitan attitudes had been transferred, with the usual time-lag, to the colonies and the planters found themselves torn between moral certitude and economic preference in their search for non-slave plantation labour.
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> With the ending of slave apprenticeship in the British West Indies colonies in 1838, many women ex-slaves sought the private sphere hitherto denied them and it was said that "mothers of families have retired from the field, to the duties of the home". [. . .] Women's

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53 Momsen (1996), op. cit., p. 217.

54 Momsen (1996), op. cit., p. 216.

> fluctuating participation rate in the agricultural work force during this period was reflected in the planters' ambivalent attitudes towards women workers, for "while the planters criticized mothers for neglecting their offspring, they preferred to hire females, whom they considered more regular than males in their work habits".[55]

It appears obvious then that planters positioned slave women in a location where they could not but receive criticism for their status as unwomanly. By the very nature of their lives, they were not allowed to be what Victorian mores would define as feminine women, per se.[56] They were instead made into mere units of work.[57] As Momsen suggests, women were more reliable. Richard Burton discusses this resultant matrifocality in the French Caribbean saying that:

> A partir des données quantitatives et, surtout, qualitatives que nous avons rassemblées, il nous semble loisible de postuler l'existence, à la Martinique, d'une structure familiale à dominante maternelle, qui se retrouverait, avec des intensités de couleur, suele la famille béké ayant un caractère nettement patrifocal, voire patriarcal.[58]

Hence, the image of the female as matriarch is concretised. She is unable to escape if she strives to improve her family's life. This forced alterity of Caribbean women is continually played out in the literature and particularly in the novels studied in this thesis. The existence of matrifocal or female-headed households has been partly determined by, in Verena Martinez-Alier's, and the Bishop of Havana's words, 'the particular type of mating characteristic of interracial unions'.[59] This is a narrow view as it only considers post-emancipation Cuba, which was (is) extremely stratified. It is emblematic of a general trend in the region. Hilary Beckles furthers this theme in his examination of the 'black' family in Barbados in *A History of Barbados*. He demonstrates that even though enslaved men and women may have considered themselves as married, particularly as relates to their own cultural practices,

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55 Ibid., p. 218.

56 For further information on this see: Ferguson (1992); and McClintock (1995).

57 For furtehr discussion of women's 'unnatural labour' see: The Report of the West India Royal Commission, 1945.

58 Richard D. E. Burton, *La Famille Coloniale: La Martinque et la mère patrie 1789-1992* (Paris, L'Harmattan 1994), p. 205.

59 Verena Martinez-Alier, *Marriage, Class and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1974), p. 127.

European society in the island or in the metropolis did not accept these unions. This will be a juncture of inevitable tension, between historical 'truth' and fiction where the white world will attempt to silence the black world. Beckles examines the trend toward matriarchy as it relates to slavery itself. He does, though, assign a stationary and permanent 'family' unit:

> Most estates in the colony in 1826 were owned by the same family fifty years earlier, so that generations of slaves were born, raised and died in the same plantation villages. This sense of continuity in slave life certainly allowed for the emergence of grandmothers and great-grandmothers as matriarchal figures on estates, empowered with tremendous moral and social authority in the slave yards. Slaves, then, by the end of the eighteenth century, could speak firmly about family lineage and traditions.[60]

Beckles focuses on the crux of the argument, highlighting that the older women held authoritative positions in the slave yards and also after. Again, this is tightly bound up in class and, as such, is very difficult to interpret beyond that.[61] A generalisation would argue, as this study tends to illustrate, that most matrifocal, female-headed households, are within the working classes, which may be predominantly black, but are in no way solely black. East Indians, mulattos and other ethnicities also make up the working classes. This does not mean, though, that female-headed households are in any way exclusive to the working classes. This thesis argues that the trend goes beyond that. It becomes typically Caribbean with all its specificities from one country to the next. Momsen continues to explain how it is that women ended up with the full burden of the domestic sphere thrust upon them:

> Women have had to accept responsibility for the financial support of their children since emancipation because of both male migration and male economic marginality. In 1970 the Commonwealth Caribbean had had 238,781 female-headed households constituting 35% of all households in the region. The proportion of female-headed households displays both cultural and spatial variation, ranging from one-half amongst the highly migratory Afro-Caribbean population of St. Kitts-Nevis to one-quarter in Trinidad and Tobago [. . .] That this pattern is long standing is clear from Brodber's study of the Jamaican free women in which she showed that second generation free women

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60 Hilary Beckles, *A History of Barbados : From Amerindian Settlement to Nation-State* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1990), p. 63.

61 For a discussion on the matrifocality/linearity of slavery, that woman's status was passed on to her offspring see: Beckles (1990), p. 65.

> even when married, chose and could choose economic independence and autonomy.[62]

Thus, women, even when they could be provided for, made certain that they could also provide for themselves, further marginalising themselves in the eyes of imperial discourse.

Observing the 'Other' in Miserable Slavery

As seen through English eyes, the 'Negroes' had no morals. Furthermore, a combination of African cultural codes (which were misunderstood) and the restrictions which slavery imposed on the enslaved Africans were in part responsible for the matrifocality (as it has become known) of the family which would have been seen as culturally 'strange'. Bush pinpoints a problem with moving back through history and re-interpreting what may have gone before. Though many inconsistencies have become visible in the 'subject woman's' (re)presentation, other issues come into play when seeking to correctly or truthfully apply a theoretical label.

> We cannot assume that codes of morality in the modern Caribbean differ only marginally from those which obtained in slave society and vice versa. Since emancipation changes in the economic and social infrastructure of West Indian societies have occurred which have had important ramifications on black family structure. For instance, the de-emphasis of the father role amongst some segments of society, which has often been cited in support of matrifocal theories of black family organisation ['These point to the disproportionate number of mother-headed families with no co-residential male and are used to stress the unstable nature of black family life and the high rate of "illegitimacy".'], rather than being a direct result of the weakening of the father role during the days of slavery, is far more plausibly the result of the migrant labour system which developed after slavery ended (Clarke, 1957).[63]

Bush illustrates how information can therefore be mis-interpreted if the researcher is not aware of the cultural specificities.

> Whilst it cannot be denied that Caribbean societies, past and present, are strongly linked in a cultural sense, in a socio-historical context

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62 Momsen, Ibid., p. 219 [This is reported in Buvinic and Youseff, 1978, op. cit.].

63 Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society 1650-1838* (London, James Curry, 1990), pp. 84-85.

> they are not strictly comparable, an important factor that must be borne in mind in any study of the family in slavery.[64]

Bush highlights the damage that ignorance can do to the understanding of cultural phenomena.

> Misinterpretation or ignorance of the position of the woman as daughter, wife and mother in West African society, in addition to the traditional economic independence of women in both matrilineal and patrilineal societies such as the Ashanti and the Ibo and the authority endowed them over their children, could have contributed to the common misconception that the slave woman was the dominant figure in the slave family. The fact that slave descent was through the female line facilitated these theories. Common law unions with whites, the practice of polygamy, widowhood and separation of married couples through sale would also have resulted in mother-headed slave households.[65]

Bush, therefore, elucidates factors that would have had an impact on the family and thereby been mitigating circumstances with how women were viewed. There still remains, though, a link to the African past. In *Dark Ancestor: The Literature of the Black Man in the Caribbean*, O. R. Dathorne frames these observations that matrifocality did not begin in the Caribbean. He may seemingly disagree with Bush's thesis, but his point is important as it illuminates a cultural code present in Africa, that has been transculturated to the Caribbean:

> The Black male had never been assigned a responsible role to play in his society and therefore the Black woman had been conditioned to the dual responsibility of mothering and fathering. [. . .] The woman—childbearer and wife—is also provider; in West Africa she is farmer and market seller.[66]

This matrifocal nature of some West African cultures is then exacerbated by slavery's imposition of strict restrictions on the enslaved peoples. Emancipation and its aftermath also affected cultural practices, as Bush states, and may have

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64 Ibid., p. 85.

65 Bush (1990), p. 91

66 O.R. Dathorne, *Dark Ancestor: The Literature of the Black Man in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State UP, 1981), p. 7.

further increased the matrifocality of the Caribbean family. Emigrations and migrations in search of employment, as seen, also impacted on the family.[67]

Bush's myth of beast of burden and scarlet woman does, though, result from historical misrepresentations of Caribbean women that have been perpetuated for centuries.[68] Benítez-Rojo sees this 'Western' colonial construct as created by

> white rhythms [which], basically, articulate themselves in a binary fashion; here the rhythm of the steps marching or running, of territorializing; it is the narrative of conquest and colonization, of the assembly line, of technological knowledge, of computer and positivist ideologies; in general these rhythms are indifferent to their social impact; they are narcissistic rhythms, obsessed with their own legitimation, carrying guilt, alienation and signs of death which they hide by proposing themselves as the best rhythms existing now or ever.[69]

This can be argued for all representation and can be extended within the parameters of this study to relate specifically to representation of the Caribbean woman. Moreover, slavery's legacy is well entrenched in the discourse of representation and is not so easy to edit out as simply proclaiming emancipation would assume. As Joan Dayan argues 'I have always suspected, as did Thomas Carlyle in "The Nigger Question" (bracketing his racist disquisition on pumpkin-eating emancipated blacks and the "dog kennel" and jungle of Haiti), that "SLAVERY, whether established by law, or by law abrogated, exists very extensively in the world . . . and in fact, that you cannot abolish slavery by act of parliament, but can only abolish the *name* of it, which is very little!"'[70] Therefore, eradicating or countering the constructs and discourses of 'Otherness' created by slavery and colonialism is an endless task. However, this does not mean that the task is futile.

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67 For discussion on the Panama Canal see: Senior (1991), op. cit., p. 108.

68 See: Barbara Bush 'History, Memory, Myth? Reconstructing the History (or Histories) of Black Women in the African Diaspora', in *Images of African and Caribbean Women: Migration, Displacement, Diaspora* ed. by Stephanie Newell, (Stirling, Centre for Commonwealth Studies, University of Stirling, November 1996), pp. 3-28; Polly Rewt, 'Public Exposure: Retrieving and Exhibiting Marginalised Histories', in Stephanie Newell ed. pp. 29-51; Blanca Silvestrini, 'Género e historiografía (los relatos y las vidas)', in *Historia y género: Vidas y relatos de mujeres en el Caribe* Mario R.Cancel compilador, (San Juan Puerto Rico, Asociación Puertorriqueña de Historiadores Postdata, 1997), pp. 9-15; María I. Quiñones Arocho, 'Sin hombre en la casa o el mito del matriarcado en el caribe angloparlante', in *Historia y Género* op. cit., pp. 30-42.

69 Benítez-Rojo (1992), op. cit., p. 26.

70 Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995), p. xx.

Dayan's observations go in tandem with Benítez-Rojo's claim that the 'white rhythms are obsessed with their own legitimation'.[71] It can be noted that they both illustrate how the power of discourse enforced over the subject by the colonising body is totalling. Colonial discourse and the images it creates are deployed to control, by speaking for the subject. Edward Said works around the area of colonial discourse and representation in *Orientalism* and also in *Culture and Imperialism*.[72] His work is useful in pointing out how the empire based in Europe created images of the 'Other' that were based on their perceptions and then supported them by conflating various types of writing to illustrate their argument for alterity. Further, Peter Hulme defines the area of colonial discourse as:

> an ensemble of linguistically-based practices unified by their common deployment in the management of colonial relationships, an ensemble that could combine the most formulaic and bureaucratic of official documents. [. . .] Underlying the idea of colonial discourse, in other words, is the presumption that during the colonial period large parts of the non-European world were *produced* for Europe through a discourse that imbricated sets of questions and assumptions, methods of procedure and analysis, and kinds of writing and imagery, normally separated out into discrete areas of military strategy, political order, social reform, imaginative literature, personal memoir and so on.[73]

Western constructed and consolidated histories with a capital 'H', or Hegelian History, as Édouard Glissant sees it, as regards Caribbean self-presentation, are a heavy burden as they generate a great deal of controversy and culturally specific representation.[74] Perhaps writers from the region can themselves best describe the baggage that history brings to a study of this nature. As Glissant states: "History [with a capital H] ends where the histories of those people once reputed to be

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71 Benítez-Rojo (1992), op. cit., p. 26.

72 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, Vintage, 1978); Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, Vintage, 1993).

73 Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797* (London, Routledge, 1986), p. 2.

74 See: Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797* (London, Routledge, 1986). Hulme argues that the colonial anthropologist reduced the Caribbean native to stereotype or character little related to the native's real self; See also: Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1978); Glissant (1989).

without history come together"'.[75] The West Indian writer is able to bring these histories together. Furthermore, Glissant argues that:

> History is a highly functional fantasy of the West, originating at precisely the time when it alone "made" the history of the World [. . .] Hegel relegated African peoples to the ahistorical, Amerindian peoples to the prehistorical, in order to reserve History for European peoples exclusively.[76]

Simon Gikandi extends Glissant's reading of history's dialectic to note how the native is made invisible in the eyes of European history:

> Froude commemorates "the brilliant period of past West Indian history" [. . .] which is by his calculations nothing less than the history of the English in the West Indies, a white and male history in which the islands function as the designated depositories of national memory and romance.[77]

The islands have thus been appropriated by the explorers and, in Gikandi's words, filled with 'national romance and memories'.[78] Within this historical context, West Indian writers have re-membered their experiences and thus articulated a different version about what transpired. Their remembered experiences are therefore in conflict with the opposing official document that Froude creates and Gikandi deconstructs.

> When he reflects on the West Indian landscape, then, what Froude sees is not the native Arawack or Carib cultures, or the social formations instituted by African slaves or Indian indentured labourers, but the historical spaces in which the triumphant moments of Englishness were played out; his gaze is directed at "a shadowy procession of great figures who have printed their names in history".[79]

The names that have printed themselves in history are not the names Caribbean writers try to reclaim. The Caribbean inhabitants have fallen in to a blind spot, or a

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75 Glissant (1989), p. 64.

76 Glissant Ibid., p. 64.

77 Gikandi, (1996), p. 104

78 Ibid.

79 Gikandi, Ibid. p. 104.

vanishing point, where Froude and others like him cannot see them, except as exploitable insignificants. It is necessary, therefore, to look at this construction of the Caribbean woman not only as a result of colonial power and discourse, but also as a fantasy that is repeated from decade to decade, century to century. Barbara Bush is another historian who, although not rooted in the Caribbean per se, writes re-evaluative socio-historical texts which re-examine old historical theories and findings so that this 'fantasy' may be dismantled. With the ethnocentricity of traditional history in mind Bush illustrates the problematic nature of historical representation:

> If historical evidence is closely examined, certain stereotypes can be seen to be at variance with certain contemporary facts. Where considerable stereotyping occurs, however, the situation is increasingly complicated by the fact that the stereotype actually draws upon actual cultural traits and can contain a "kernel of truth", no matter how distorted this may be. This is particularly relevant where contemporary discussions of slave morality are involved. The image of the black woman held by abolitionists differed from that of the planter, yet [it] was equally a distortion of reality based on racist images of African culture.[80]

These distortions were taken as factual information due to their presentation by those in authoritative positions.[81] Bush describes the difficulty of ascertaining a distinction between fact and fiction or, as she refers to it, distortions of reality. Such distortions reflect a cultural bias which leads to the creation of a negative stereotype of black or Caribbean women.[82] Therefore, one can understand that the black woman in the West Indies has been subject to distorted representations for centuries, which had already been written by those who oppressed her. However, those who meant to emancipate her also saw her as an aberration as compared to their own cultural codes of femininity. Barbara Bush states that even the role of the black woman was

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80 Bush (1990), p. 13.

81 See also: Barbara Bush, 'History, Memory, Myth? Reconstructing the History (or Histories) of Black Women in the African Diaspora' (1996).

82 For discussions on this type of representation see: Richard Burton, '"Maman-France Doudou": Family Images in French West Indian Colonial Discourse' *Diacritics*, 23 (3) 69-90. Burton discusses and critiques the construct of the *Doudou* in the French Caribbean and colonial French depiction of Caribbean women. See also: J. California Cooper, *Family* (New York, Doubleday, 1990); Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1987); for illustrations of sexualised black women during and post-slavery; David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration* (Durham, Duke UP, 1993); Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London, Routledge, 1995); Gikandi (1996); See also: Catherine Hall, 'Going a-Trolloping: imperial man travels the Empire', in *Gender and Imperialism* op. cit., pp. 180-199.

seen through white eyes as so vastly different from their reality, again resulting in her further condemnation.

> The image of the black woman as dominant within the slave family was further enhanced by the glaring contrast between the roles and functions of black and white women in the contemporary cultural context. In comparison to the relative independence of black women, the white woman in plantation society had a highly subordinate and unfavourable status, despite the glowing image presented of white womanhood by such plantocratic writers as Thomas Atwood.[83]

It is not surprising therefore that on the plantations during and immediately after slavery, there was considerable tension between white women and Caribbean women, as Bush has illustrated. The role the former was allowed to play was truncated by Eurocentric patriarchal control. And the role of the latter increased disproportionately. In spite of the issues of freedom and ownership, the role thrust upon the Caribbean woman was seen by some mistresses to be less constricted than their own.[84] Simply put, white women in the region, who were governed by strict Victorian rules for womanhood, were delimited to the house and hearth, childbearing, and entertaining. They were not, however, expected to nurse their own children. The wet-nurse was there for that.[85] Black women were seen by them to have more freedom of movement and of expression.

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83 Bush (1990), p.91

84 Bush (1990), op. cit., p.91; See also: Moira Ferguson, 'Introduction' *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* (London, Pandora, 1987); Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834* (New York, Routledge, 1992).

85 See: Beckles (1990)

`The Lascivious Black Woman and Other Stereotypes

Barbara Bush illustrates the Caribbean woman's relegation to the realm of stereotype elucidating the 'use' of the gaze to accomplish the goal of 'Othering' them. Colonial historians and anthropologists 'utilised their scanty and inaccurate knowledge in order to pronounce with confidence upon aspects of the life of the woman slave, including her private domestic life'.[86] Similarly, David Spurr argues that it is the very gaze that further imbricates the West Indian woman as 'Other'.[87]

As Bush argues, it is not only the gaze that imbricates the slave woman within a hostile space but also the attitudes used against her.[88] The ironic aspect of the identification of the slave woman as a lascivious, loose woman is that she does not have control over her body and therefore cannot control the images created of her or the abuses heaped on her at the hand of her owners, as seen in Thomas Tryon's observations above.[89] Hence, her sexual exploitation is not so much a result of her wanton ways as it is the outcome of exploitation by and economic gain for the slave masters and mistresses.[90] Joan Dayan describes this relationship:

> The history of slavery is given substance through time by a spirit that originated in an experience of domination. That domination was most often experienced by women under another name, something called "love". In that unnatural situation where a human became property, love became coordinate with a task of feeling that depended to a large extent on the experience of servitude. [. . .] domination encouraged the brutalization of "enlightened man" and enflamed his unbridled appetite for lust and cruelty.[91]

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86 Bush (1990), op. cit., p. 12.

87 See: David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration* (Durham, Duke UP, 1993).

88 Bush (1990); See also for literary detail of this: Cirilo Villaverde, *Cecilia Valdés: Novela de costumbres Cubanas* 3rd edition, (Mexico, Editorial Porrúa, S. A., 1986), where the narrator illustrates that, as a mulata, having been educated out of her class, Cecilia can do nothing. See also: Huguette Dagenais, 'Women in Guadeloupe: The Paradoxes of Reality', in *Women and Change* op. cit., pp. 83-108.

89 Thomas Tryon (1999); See for a literary: J. California Cooper, *Family* (New York, Doubleday, 1991).

90 See: Walker (1981), op. cit., p. 42; Lola Young (1990); Bush (1990), op. cit., p. 14 and p. 17; W. D, Jordan, 'First Impressions: initial English confrontations with Africans' in C. Husband (ed.), *'Race' in Britain* (London, Hutchinson, 1982), pp. 52-53; Robert Young (1995), op. cit., p. 193, discusses the repulsion/attraction duality presented in 'Colonial Desire'; Hill Collins (1990).

91 Dayan (1995), op. cit., p. 56.

Dayan illustrates how 'love' in many ways was used as a weapon to subjugate black women. Because of their position of slave these women could not go against the master's wishes without the fear of great abuse and suffering. The enslaved woman must suffer under the master's brutal abuse and exploitation of her. She must also suffer the abuse the mistress heaps on her for being a 'loose', 'immoral' woman, although the mistress's husband has probably forced the woman into having sexual relations with him. Notwithstanding this, there were women who did seek out relations with the slave master either for their own progress or for some other gain. Meanwhile, Mrs Carmichael's *Domestic Manners and Social Condition* re-solidifies this image of the black female as lascivious when she observes that:

> The negro cares little for his father; but many are at a loss upon this subject, for there are not a few females who are sufficiently cunning to obtain presents for their children from two or more different men, whom they separately claim as the fathers of their children. I recollect V., who had two regular husbands, one in town and the other in the country; she had been confined a daughter about ten days, when her grandmother exhibited to me the presents of the papa to his little girl, [. . .] V. was determined to have something from both husbands; and when the country husband came to see her, she cursed him, "cause he had never once had a thought for his pic-a-ninny;"[92]

She further states:

> From what I have said above, it will be gathered that negro females also often have several husbands: but they have always one in particular, with whom they live. The really respectable female negro, however, has generally only one husband; and in this one particular only, is the respectable female negro more moral than the male'.[93]

Though Mrs. Carmichael's comments on the 'Negro' race in general do not seem overly hostile, her attacks on enslaved African women are nonetheless scathing. Black women are immoral. Few are the exceptions. Bush suggests why a woman in Mrs. Carmichael's position would feel as she did: 'Although [...][she], as a white woman, was undoubtedly personally hostile, a marked tendency did exist, on the

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92 Mrs. Carmichael, *Domestic Manners and Social Condition of the White, Coloured and Negro Population of the West Indies* 2 Vols. (New York, Negro University Press, 1833), Vol. 1, p. 297.

93 Ibid., p. 298.

part of white men, to transfer the blame for their sexual improprieties on to the 'forwardness' of black women and thus exonerate themselves'.[94]

Bush discusses this within the context of the slave woman's desire to marry and also the European master's intention to Christianise these people. She also pointedly explores the relations between slave masters and enslaved women and demonstrates the need to re-evaluate the master's discourse of condemnation against the enslaved women more along the lines of Robert Young's colonial desiring.[95]

> Despite the unflattering picture painted by white men, in practice the physical appearance of black women failed to repel them sexually. Few men, however, openly admitted to their attractions for and relationships with slave women. The majority were hypocrites. They utilised the alleged physical and moral inferiority of black women, in contrast to European women, to establish them firmly in the role of the "other woman"; one set of moral standards was applicable to white women, another less honourable set to blacks; the superiority of white women was stressed. [. . .] By the late eighteenth century, the black and, even more so, the coloured woman was well established, in the eyes of the white man, in her role as concubine. According to plantocratic commentators like Bryan Edwards slave women were free of any restrictive moral codes, "refused to confine themselves to a single connexion with the other sex" and boldly disposed of themselves sexually "according to their own will and pleasure". Thomas Atwood declared that marriage among slaves was unstable, the more so because it was "common for women to leave their husbands for others"; slave women were prostitutes who submitted to white men for money or clothes and likewise sold their own daughters for "a moderate sum".[96]

But Bush counters observations, similar to Mrs. Carmichael's, of black women's sexual lasciviousness:

> As had been shown, under the African-derived marriage forms adopted by the slaves, women retained an independence of action and equality of status, especially with respect to divorce, denied the vast majority of European women. Thus slaves had strong reason to resist Christian marriage with its creed of lifelong fidelity and total submission to a husband's authority.[97]

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94 Bush (1990), op. cit., p. 18.

95 See: Robert Young on Colonial Desire in *Colonial Desire* (London, Routledge, 1995).

96 Bush, (1990), p. 17.

97 Ibid. , p. 101-102.

This relative freedom from submission separates black women from their European counterparts. This is yet another reason for hostility between the two groups. Bush gives the example of a woman who hides to escape marriage to her husband with whom she had been living for years because 'she feared it would give him license to beat and ill-treat her (strong grounds for divorce in African cultures)'.[98] As Momsen similarly points out, slave women had a remarkable amount of independence from the men, a possible basis for jealousy and thus contempt on the part of European women—who were tied to their husbands and had to surrender their agency to them even in the face of their infidelity.[99] In *Subject to Others*, Moira Ferguson gives an in-depth discussion of this problem, observing that black women were caught in an impossible position between slavery and Victorian morals.[100] Meanwhile, Patricia Hill Collins further examines these distortions or controlling images in her book, *Black Feminist Thought*:

> The controlling images applied to Black women are so uniformly negative that they almost necessitate resistance if Black women are to have any positive self-image. For Black women, constructed knowledge of self emerges from the struggle to reject controlling images and integrate knowledge deemed personally important, usually knowledge essential to Black women's survival.[101]

Collins aptly employs the words 'applied to Black women' to illustrate the external construction of these images.[102] The task facing Caribbean women, as Collins argues, then becomes the possibility of liberating the self from within an overwhelmingly negative enclosure of colonially produced images. The images applied to black women to which Collins refers are similar to those discussed by Barbara Bush: 'The common image of the woman slave, culled from planter and abolitionist sources

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98 Ibid., p. 102.

99 See: Moira Ferguson *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834*. (New York, Routledge, 1992).

100 For more discussion on the images applied to black women and the realities they faced, See: Ferguson (1992); Moira Ferguson, 'Introduction' *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave, as related by Herself* (Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1987); Moira Ferguson, *Colonialism and Gender Relations from Mary Wolstencraft to Jamaica Kincaid* (New York, Columbia UP, 1993); Moira Ferguson, ed. *The Hart Sisters: Early African Caribbean Writers, Evangelicals, and Radicals* (Lincoln, Nebraska UP, 1993); bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman* (London, Pluto, 1982), p. 85; See also: Claire Midgley, ed. *Gender and Imperialism* 'Introduction: Gender and imperialism: mapping the connections', pp. 1-20, and chapter 7 'Anti-slavery and the Root of 'imperial feminism', op. cit., pp. 161-179.

101 Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (London, Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 95.

102 See also: Senior (1992), op cit., p. 3-4; See also: Hulme (1986); Gikandi (1996); Spurr (1993).

alike, is a compound of the scarlet woman, the domineering matriarch and the passive workhorse'.[103] Planters and abolitionists imposed those controlling images to 'Other' the black woman and by so doing insisted on her alterity. These labels dehumanised the Caribbean woman as did Froude's and Long's eyewitness reports. The gaze once again controls. Bush focuses on the overwhelmingly negative consolidation of the black or Caribbean woman within a long-lasting construct that changes with time but still delimits her potential.[104] The stereotype changes and adapts as time progresses so that it remains appropriate and applicable even though the exact situation has been altered. Thus, Bush demonstrates the virtual impossibility of any easy deconstruction of the historical enclosure around the Antillian subject.

Ultimately, and problematically, these damaging stereotypes are long lasting and resilient. Hulme also discusses the steadfast nature of stereotypes:

> What we have here, in other words, in texts that claim historical and scientific accuracy, is the elaboration and corroboration of ethnic stereotypes, more powerful for being embedded in contexts which convey a certain amount of historical and ethnographic information [. . .] As always, the stereotype operates principally through a judicious combination of adjectives which establish characteristics as eternal verities immune from the irrelevancies of historical moment: "ferocious", "warlike", "hostile", "truculent and vindictive".[105]

Hulme observes that these characteristics may have been appropriate in one historical moment, but have since become blanket terms that disallow and disavow any escape from within their enclosure. The context here is a world in which partial characteristics are applied to entire realities. Words that would fit into the particular context of Hulme's and Bush's arguments would be 'passive', 'hardworking', 'immoral', 'lascivious', 'domineering', among others, having replaced words such as 'warlike' and 'hostile'.[106] The fact that the black woman is forced into hard labour is never considered. She works like a man, or better, and that is all that is seen from a slave master's perspective. This is the only time she is visible to

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103 Bush (1990), op. cit., p. 5.

104 Bush (1990), op. cit., p. 13.

105 Hulme (1986), op. cit, p. 49. See: Burton, op. cit., p. 4-5.

106 Ibid.

the master's eyes, and in this way a partial description of her life is made to appear as the whole. As Zora Neale Hurston puts it: 'Women get no bonus just for being female down there. She can do the same labors as a man or a mule and nobody thinks anything about it'.[107]

Understandably then, many slave masters believed that they were in no way misrepresenting the slaves as that part of their lives was all they could see, and moreover, slaves were not people—they were chattel. The black woman had no alternative than to allow for the perpetuation of those terms. She was often positioned by planters and abolitionists as the 'domineering matriarch' who was hard-working and fought to keep her family together.[108]

Arguably, Joan Dayan's assertion that 'slavery never ended' adds credence to the difficulty of deconstructing this enclosure as it highlights that the only difference now is that the word 'slavery' has been abolished, which does not signal that the attitudes, prejudices and realities that went along with it have disappeared. Therefore, the depiction of the slave woman's character as a lascivious, hard-working, domineering 'mammy' is embedded in the system of colonial representation and control.[109] Beckles furthers this line of argument. He illustrates how black women were caught in the trap of having to nurse their masters' children as well as their own. They were expected to nurse them well, perhaps better than their own in order to remain in favour with their masters, while hoping to gain favour for future prosperity, and that would further marginalise them.[110]

Certainly, the Caribbean woman or former slave woman did indeed have to labour intensively, to provide food for herself and her family, to make money to survive, to work all day in the master's house or field, to bring up children single-handedly, as perceived by the master, while in reality, in the absence of a male, she would have relied on her female networks for support. Also, permanent

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107 Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott Inc. 1938), p. 59. Hurston's observations are taken out of their time but they articulate the same trend in representation as the slave master's image of the enslaved woman.

108 Bush (1990), op. cit., p. 5.

109 See: Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (New York, Routledge, 1994); David Spurr also argues for the problems with 'reporting' that allow the creation of negative stereotype or representation, op. cit., p. 13.

110 Hilary McD. Beckles, *A History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to Nation-State* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1990),

bonds between slaves were discouraged under slavery,[111] and, non-western kinship networks were not seen as valid alternatives to the western construct of the European male-headed family. Slavery made the European model family structure impossible. Because the enslaved people were seen as savage they could in no way qualify as humans and therefore were always judged as being too inferior to have permanent relationships and by extension families.[112] During slavery, if the black woman did not work hard she would be punished and after emancipation if she did not work hard she and her dependants would starve.

By stating that both planters and abolitionists figured the black woman in the same way, Bush elucidates the collusion between both groups to 'Other' the black woman. These groups almost encouraged her exploitation—because of her alterity—even while the abolitionist group was arguing for abolition. This presents a problematic stance because, although the abolitionists argue for the black woman's emancipation and the end of slavery in general, they continue to deploy a message of difference and inferiority. In *The Idea of Race in Science,* Nancy Stepan illustrates this continued 'Othering' as it relates to blacks in general:

> A fundamental question about the history of racism in the first half of the nineteenth century is why it was that, just as the battle against slavery was being won by abolitionists, the war against racism was being lost. The Negro was freed by the Emancipation Act of 1833, but in the British mind he was still mentally, morally and physically a slave.[113]

Slavery's end, therefore, made little difference to either sex. However, the Victorian perspective made it difficult for the black woman to move into the mainstream as a

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111 See: Bush (1990); Momsen (1993); Senior (1991). For more information on female kin networks see: Terborg-Penn, 'Through an African Feminist Theoretical Lens: Viewing Caribbean Women's History Cross-Culturally', in *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective* ed. by Verene Shepherd, Bridget Brereton and Barbara Bailey, (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 3-19.

112 For examples of how slaves were separated see: Olaudah Equiano, *Equiano's Travels-His Autobiography; The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassar* ed. by Paul Edwards, (London, Penguin, 1967).

113 Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960* (Hamden, Conn., 1982), p. 1.

'normal' human being. The Caribbean woman was, therefore, never given equal status with her white European or American counterparts.[114]

Like Momsen, Bush illustrates the double-bind in which enslaved women were locked. Their alterity was insisted upon and cultural differences were elided to stabilise Englishness, or Europeanness, as it was constructed against Otherness, as Gikandi discusses. Thus, the need to deconstruct this image is essential in the face of what these critics have termed blanket negativity. Peter Hulme refers to this trend in representation as anthropology's reductive analysis of 'primitive' cultures.[115]

The focus on 'making do' was more reason for the Caribbean woman's further marginalisation in the mind of the coloniser.[116] She exhibited, through necessity, some of the characteristics deemed to be contemptible.[117] But the idea of slave and slave women's passive acceptance of this lot is erroneously perpetuated. As Torres-Saillant argues:

> [Mayrse] Condé recalls the thousands of slaves who hurled themselves into the ocean from the slave ships, or who trained themselves to keep quiet, or who starved themselves to death, or killed their children, or poisoned their masters, before accepting their lot.[118]

These attempts at resistance to representation, control and slavery were, however, never considered by the colonising forces.[119] The challenge then is to resuscitate a three-dimensional being out of the damaged fibres of history. Historical accounts are arguably the best source, though they themselves were often constructed

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114 See: Alice Walker, 'Coming Apart' *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (New York, 1981), p. 42; Lola Young, 'A nasty piece of work: a psychoanalytic study of sexual and racial difference in "Mona Lisa"' in J. Rutherford (ed.), *Identity-Community, Culture, Difference* (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), p. 195; bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman* (London, Pluto, 1982), p. 85; P. H. Collins (1990), op. cit., p. 51.

115 See: Hulme (1986), op. cit., p. 55.

116 For more information on Caribbean woman's role 'making do' during and after slavery see: Momsen (1996), p. 216-217; Bush, (1990), op. cit., p. 17; Herbert S. Klein, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York, Oxford UP, 1986); Beckles (1990), op. cit., p. 63; See: Scarano's discussion in 'Labor and Society in the Nineteenth Century', in *The Modern Caribbean* ed. by Franklin W. Knight and Colin A. Palmer(Chapel Hill, 1989), pp. 51-84; Delia Jarret-Macauley, 'Exemplary Women', p. 42; Bridget Brereton, 'Society and Culture in the Caribbean: The British and French West Indies, 1870-1980', in Knight and Palmer eds. op. cit., pp. 90-91; Bush (1990), op. cit., pp. 84-85.

117 Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse* (Philadelphia: J.R. Lippincott Co., 1938), p. 58.

118 Torres-Saillant (1997), op. cit., p. 42.

119 See: Said (1994), op. cit., pp. xi-xii.

around false premises and partial truths. Notwithstanding such shortcomings, these accounts frequently remain the official versions until revisionist re-readings and re-writings of history are read alongside them. The coloniser's gaze, however, continues to imprison these women in the one-dimensional world of the negative stereotype.[120]

Caribbean Female Alterity in Literary Reproductions

The new awareness that has come through current re-readings of colonial texts has made evident the problematic representation of West Indian women. With this rereading in mind, scholars who argue from a post-colonial perspective illustrate how colonial subjects have been 'Othered' by official representations which entered into the public imagination. Each language group or colonial power within the Caribbean has developed its own stereotype of the lascivious black woman or *mulata sabrosa*.[121] The latter was preferred by many colonial men for her 'exotic' look and her 'almost whiteness'. She is the *doudou* in the French Caribbean as Richard Burton describes her:

> Another important mythological representation of the colonial relationship that came to prominence under the Third Republic revolved around the figure of *La doudou*, the smiling, sexually available black or colored woman (usually the latter) who gives herself heart, mind, and body to a visiting Frenchman (usually a soldier or colonial official) and is left desolate when her lover abandons her to return to France, having, of course, refused to marry her though often leaving her with a child who will at least "lighten the race."[122]

As Burton points out, the character of the *doudou* arises from French fantasies about Caribbean women. He focuses on the idea that the woman is sexually available, but is also very desirous of a relationship with a Frenchman or two with the intent on improving the quality of life of her offspring by virtue of a lighter complexion. Burton discusses the history and development of the myth and

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120 See: The West Indian Royal (Moyen) Commission as late as 1938 confirmed and by so doing reinforced beliefs in black female alterity; Bush (1990); Bush (1996).

121 This would be the equivalent of a saucy, sexually charged and exuberant woman of colour.

122 Burton, op. cit.,p. 81.

illustrates its eventual appropriation by the local population, explaining that it was taken on

> [f]irst by the white Creole elite and then, late in the nineteenth century, by the colored and black bourgeoisie. For white creole novelists writing after the abolition of slavery, the *doudou* myth not only legitimated *béké* sexual exploitation of black and colored women—it's not we who want them, say countless *doudou* stories of the period, but they who want us—but, beyond that, sanctioned the political, social, and economic power that they, the béké phallocrats, exercised over a systematically "feminized" black and brown population.[123]

In conjunction with the marginalisation obvious from the depiction of the black woman, Burton illustrates that a great political advantage was gained by perpetuating the *doudou* myth. This enabled easier economic exploitation of an enslaved people. Hilary Beckles discusses a similar point in his *History of Barbados*. He points out that by sleeping with the enslaved women, the master kept the numbers of his slave population up.[124] Therefore, by encouraging the continuation of the image of the stereotypically lascivious black woman, the slave master prospered, as Burton illustrates in the French West Indies. The Caribbean woman's inferiority is not surprisingly taken up by many European writers.

One of the better known fictional examples in the Anglophone Caribbean of the depiction of the Caribbean woman in general—and not limited to the black woman specifically—comes from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Since a great deal of re-visionary work has been done on the text since the appearance of Jean Rhys's novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966,[125] it will suffice to point out the author's utilisation, conscious or unconscious, of a colonial trope.[126] *Jane Eyre* is a novel ostensibly about an English heroine, but which is also illustrative of the negative stereotypical portrayal of the Caribbean woman: base, lascivious and cursed, not to mention

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123 Burton, op. cit., p. 81.

124 Beckles (1990), op. cit., p. 65.

125 Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Harmondswoth, Penguin, 1966).

126 Other texts where women are marginalised are Edward Long and Lady Maria Nugent's work. Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica* 3 vols. (London, T. Lowndes, 1774); Phillips Wright, ed., *Lady Nugent's Journal of her Residence in Jamaica from 1801-1805* (Kingston, Institute of Jamaica, 1966); See also: Gikandi (1996), op. cit., chapter 4 'Imperial Femininity: Reading Gender in the Culture of Colonialism' pp. 119-156.

savage and untameable.[127] A salient example of this damaging stereotype is seen when Jane, the narrator, describes Bertha Mason:

> A fierce cry seemed to give the lie to her favorable report: the clothed hyena, rose up, and stood tall on its hind feet. [. . .] The maniac bellowed: she parted her shaggy locks from her visage, and gazed wildly at her visitors. I recognized well that purple face—those bloated features. [. . .] The lunatic sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek: they struggled. She was a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest—more than once she almost throttled him, athletic as he was.[128]

The Antillian woman is presented as fierce, and animalistic. She is not human. In Jane's eyes, and thus the reader's imaginings, she is a savage. The severity of Jane's description coincides with Rochester's condemnation of his wife, Bertha. He celebrates her beauty, but only tongue-in-cheek, pointing out that it hides negative traits. Describing how he first met Bertha, Rochester recalls:

> Miss Mason was the boast of Spanish Town for her beauty: and this was no lie. I found her a fine woman, in the style of Blanche Ingram; tall, dark, and majestic. Her family wished to secure me, because I was of a good race [. . .] She flattered me, and lavishly displayed for my pleasures her charms and accomplishments. All the men in her circle seemed to admire her and envy me. I was dazzled, stimulated: my senses were excited; and being ignorant, raw, and inexperienced, I thought I loved her. [. . .] I was not sure of the existence of one virtue in her nature: I had marked neither modesty, nor benevolence, nor candor, nor refinement in her mind or manners.[129]

Already, Rochester throws into question Bertha's morality. He effectively reconstructs the stereotype of the lascivious woman who only knows pleasure. The characteristics he observes to be missing in Bertha are those ever present in well bred

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127 For discussion and examples of this image see: Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847) *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women.* ed. by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (New York, Norton, 1996. pp. 472-784), p. 674; See: Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, Yale UP, 1979); Gayatri Spivak's essay 'Three Women's Texts' in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London, Routledge, 1995), pp. 269-272; See also: Evelyn O'Calaghan, *Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women* (London, Macmillan, 1993); Evelyn O'Callaghan, 'The Bottomless Abyss: 'Mad' Women in Some Caribbean Novels', in *Bulletin of Eastern Caribbean Affairs* 11, no. 1 (1985), pp. 45-58; Evelyn O'Callaghan 'Interior Schisms Dramatised: The Treatment of the 'Mad' Woman in the Work of some Female Caribbean Novelists', in *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women Writers and Literature* ed. by Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido (Trenton, Africa World Press, 1990), pp.89-110; O'Callaghan 'Engineering the Female Subject: Erna Brodber's *Myal*. Paper presented at the Caribbean Women Writers Conference, St. Augustine, Trinidad, 24-27 April.

128 Charlotte Brontë, op. cit., p. 674.

129 Brontë (1847), op. cit., p. 682.

English women, like Jane.[130] Savagery is thus mixed with beauty. Rochester juxtaposes his original impression with his final and lasting opinion of his wife.

> Her character had ripened and developed with frightful rapidity; her vices sprang up fast and rank: they were so strong. Only cruelty could check them [. . .] What a pigmy intellect she had—and what giant propensities! [. . .] Bertha Mason,—the true daughter of an infamous mother,—dragged me through all the hideous and degrading agonies which must attend a man bound to a wife at once intemperate and unchaste.[131]

Illustrated then is the conflation of the scarlet woman, the base character and the lunatic. Absolutely no redeeming character is present in this depiction of a West Indian woman. Rochester's description of Bertha as unchaste pronounces the thematic similarity of the region. As Burton points out, French men would argue that the *doudou* came after them, they did not pursue her, thus, consolidating the idea of the wanton woman who knows no limits. In Rochester's discourse, Bertha's very beauty is used against her. It signals her foreign, exotic, inferior status. In a word it 'Others' her. 'She is a threatening presence, confined to an attic room'.[132]

Jean Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* rescues or fleshes out the character of the first Mrs. Rochester in Brontë's novel. It is precisely through such re-mappings that post-colonial criticism has brought about a different understanding of a text such as Brontë's, particularly when *Jane Eyre* is read alongside Jean Rhys's novel, thus inviting a re-evaluation of the Caribbean Other. Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* devotes an entire chapter, 'Consolidated Vision', to rereading and re-mapping lines of colonialism in Brontë's work and similar texts.[133] Said illustrates how '[t]he right to colonial possessions helps to establish social order and moral priorities at home',[134] and is a process of 'Othering' that privileges whiteness or Englishness.

Similarly, the danger for white society as presented by the Caribbean woman is also demonstrated by the character Cecilia Valdés in Cirilo Villaverde's novel

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130 See: Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (San Diego, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1929); See also: Ferguson (1992).

131 Brontë (1847), op. cit., p. 683.

132 Said (1993), op. cit., p. 73.

133 *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, Vintage, 1993), pp. 73-229.

134 Ibid., p. 73.

Cecilia Valdés.[135] The most significant problem in *Cecilia Valdés* is that Cecilia, a light skinned *mulata*, can pass for white. This is a very desirable position in Caribbean society, where a mulatto becomes almost indistinguishable from a fully white person. She is very beautiful. She uses this to improve her position in life, but it is her undoing. Due to the strict social stratification in Cuba, she ultimately loses when her true ethnicity is revealed.[136] This multiplicity of examples of the Antillian female as exotic 'Other' is deployed in many texts and assumes such a uniformity that it comes close to forming what appears to be a monolithic representation.

Rhys illustrates that these racial differences and gender constructs do exist, even from a Caribbean perspective. West Indian mothers and grandmothers particularly, have fought against these stereotypes for the sake of their daughters and granddaughters. However, this battle Antillian women fight against is embedded in cultural resistance as they must fight to dismantle the image of the beast of burden and also the threat of being perceived as a scarlet woman. Often, the only solution seemingly available to Caribbean grandmothers and mothers, therefore, is to impose strict Victorian morals on these younger women. This imposition, however, seeks to further marginalise them or delimit them in what they, as respectable women, can do with their lives.[137] This is, however, loaded with cultural specificities as the women negotiate a space within the façade of Victorian morals so that they can free their Caribbean-self. In short, many women insist on the appearance of virtue while permitting other behaviour under its cover. The best way to define this in the Caribbean would be to use the term 'saving face'. It is fine to break the boundary between the Victorian and the Caribbean as long as no one will see the person in the act. At times, however, a seeming acceptance and imposition of these strict morals is apparent, but it may be a mere façade for a different way of life.

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135 Cirilo Villaverde, *Cecilia Valdés: Novela de costumbres Cubanas* 3rd edition, (Mexico, Editorial Porrúa, S. A., 1986).

136 Villaverde (1986); See also: Verena Martínez-Alier, *Marriage, Class and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in Slave Society* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1974).

137 See: Jamaica Kincaid, 'Girl', in *At the Bottom of the River* (New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1992), pp. 3-5; See also: Kincaid's criticism of lack of education for young women in *Lucy*; Kincaid also criticises the role women and girls must live. See: *Annie John* (New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1986), pp. 95-103.

Jamaica Kincaid's work provides excellent illustrations of Caribbean women imposing these strict morals on their daughters.[138] Kincaid also criticises the ridiculous nature of these restrictions and how truncating they are for women and young girls.[139] She also criticises the double standard that exists. In her work she illustrates how the mother is constantly besieged by negative energies and unpleasant attacks from other women whom the father may entertain. Caribbean daughters and granddaughters are thus caught in a double-bind.[140] They must be good women which means being so called model wives and mothers, which indicates submission to patriarchy, or they are considered to be loose women. In 'Reputation and Respectability Reconsidered', Jean Besson explores the contradictions evidenced in Afro-Caribbean society:

> Women are one of the strongest forces for respectability. [. . .] By and large [. . .] it is women who think and act in terms of respectability, it is women, far more than men, who conceive of the future as respectability. If they themselves cannot become respectable, then perhaps their children will be. There is a constant tacit approval of respectability and a deliberate working on its behalf.[141]

Besson goes on to cite many others who consider Afro-Caribbean women the perpetuators of this colonial double-standard that will only serve to further marginalise or alienate and dislocate their daughters, and perhaps their sons, as seen in Kincaid's work. Besson points out:

> Ideally, the woman is passive and enduring. Her world is restricted; her place is home. [. . .] A woman's domain is one of the formalized morality and codified legality. Church membership is important to her and marriage is her fulfilment. The woman does not seek to build a reputation on the basis of personal exploits. She seeks rather to fashion a mantle of respectability.[142]

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138 See: Jean Besson, 'Reputation and Respectability Reconsidered: A New Perspective on Afro-Caribbean Peasant Women', in Janet Momsen ed. *Women and Change in the Caribbean.* op. cit. p. 21.

139 For more observations on the role of women as cultural bearers See: Bush, (1990), op. cit., p. 153. Bush quotes from Herskovitz's observations.

140 See: Ferguson (1992),

141 Jean Besson, 'Reputation and Respectability Reconsidered: A New Perspective on Afro-Caribbean Peasant Women', she quotes from Peter Wilson (1973: 234), p. 18.

142 Besson, p. 19, She cites Robert Dirk's research in the British Virgin Islands. This statement is located in one particular part of the Caribbean and does not propose to be all-encompassing.

Besson and Dirk's observations form an interesting parallel with Kincaid's social criticisms. Kincaid's story 'Girl' illustrates a more traditional approach to the acceptance and perpetuation of Victorian morals and the ideal role a woman should play. The strongly satirical tone indicates the criticism inherent in the writing. The trend of female elders insisting that girls adjust to the role of ideal wife and mother has changed, however, and more grandmothers are encouraging their granddaughters to embark on less traditional and therefore less restrictive positions.

These literary observations, coupled with criticism of the nature of Western feminism and discourse by cultural commentators such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, illustrate the problems incurred by relying too heavily on Western thought to liberate the subject. Mohanty argues that in many ways, because of the unidirectional flow of knowledge, Western critics have enshrined a monolithic '"Third World Woman". She is hemmed in by a small set of inflexible images of matriarch, virgin, submissive wife, or veiled woman—similar to the stereotypes feminism [tried to] dismantle in the West in the 1970s'.[143] Mohanty's argument intersects with that of Richard Burton as they both condemn the restrictive enclosure Western or Eurocentric discourse sets up for colonials in general, and colonial women in particular. This continues even after the end of European imperialism. Parts of Mohanty's criteria are applicable to Caribbean women. Eurocentric historians and cultural anthropologists, such as Froude and Long, for example, and also those whom Bush and Hulme counter in their works, often apply this severely restrictive limitation of representation regardless of suitability or appropriateness.[144]Engaging with the language of empire and colonialism, as regards the straitjacketing and 'Othering' by stereotypes, is therefore intricately involved in the process of liberating the subjugated 'Other'.

Disallowing the Caribbean woman agency is a method of denying her human status.[145] As Ivette Romero says:

> Although women have played an important role in the reconstructing and passing down of these braids of cultural information, their voices

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143 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse' in Childs and Williams eds., op. cit. p. 200.

144 James Anthony Froude (1888); Edward Long (1774).

145 See: Bush (1990); See also: Besson (1993)

> have not always been legitimized or heard over the din of power's discourses.[146]

These braids of cultural information are arguably stories and oral histories that women continued to pass on to their children and grandchildren. This was the only time that they assumed a voice for themselves, thereby supposing a humanity that slavery did not allow: to have a voice meant that one had to be human. Conceding to the Caribbean woman's humanity would thus undermine the enslaver's ability to continue to cast her in the role of chattel.[147]

Silencing other stories or versions is accomplished easily by the official discourse's authority over the object of representation. Thus producing a Caribbean that is subject to others.[148] The term, subject, taken at its semantic level indicates that the West Indian woman will be subjected by whomever is in power. As victim of subjugation, she is made into an object, almost completely disempowered. Gikandi explains:

> To be a colonial subject in the nineteenth century, then, is to exist in a cultural cul-de-sac: you cannot speak or exist except in terms established by the *imperium;* you have to speak to exist, but you can utter only what the dominant allows you to utter; even when you speak against the culture of the colonialism, you speak its language because it is what constitutes what you are.[149]

The double-bind in which the subject finds herself is obvious. The argument that images of Caribbean or black women are overwhelmingly negative would then become even more poignant.[150] Resistance to the dominant discourse and the cultural

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146 Ivette Romero, 'Witnessing: Women's testimonial narrative in the French and Spanish Caribbean' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Cornell University, 1993), p.1.

147 See: Bush (1990). See: Foucault's use of the term 'subject'. Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in *Michele Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* ed. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, (Illinois, University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 212.

148 See: Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others*

149 Gikandi (1996), op. cit. p. 142.

150 See also: David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration* (Durham, Duke UP, 1993); Hill Collins (1990).

homogenisation and supremacy that result from it becomes a significant tool in the struggle to articulate a self or an identity that has been negated.[151]

In conjunction with this negation of the black woman's identity is the cultural outsider's judgement of her using a set of values and morals that she, as an Antillian woman, enslaved and poor, could never hope to fit into. This further 'Othering' is seen in Hurston's *Tell My Horse*:

> In Jamaica it is a common sight to see skinny-looking but muscular black women sitting on top of a pile of rocks with a hammer making little ones out of big ones. They look so wretched with their bare black feet all gnarled and distorted from walking barefoot over rocks. The nails on their big toes thickened like a hoof from a life time of knocking against stones. All covered over with the grey dust of the road, those feet look almost saurian and repellent. Of course, their clothing is meager, cheap, and ugly.[152]

While Hurston does elucidate the polemics of black female subservience and her role as talking mule, she also falls into the pattern of re-imbricating the Caribbean woman in a realm of 'Other' where she, as an outsider, does not see the inequality of the situation. She does not realise that she is looking at these women from a distinct cultural gaze and also a position of relative superiority. She still insists, as she does at the end of the quote, that their clothes are ugly, trivialising the women labourers, in this instance, to the level of their clothes, as other anthropologists have done before her. Joan Dayan sees perpetuations similar to Hurston's as 'the binaries fundamental in much of Western thought', and suggests that 'those compelling oppositions (virgin/whore, peasant/lady, beauty/hag) embedded in the lexicon are difficult to break out of, especially for writers representing places least known but most appropriated as symbols'.[153]

Therefore, Hurston's closing comment to the paragraph re-deploys the tools of representation. She simply groups all women together by stating: 'And everywhere in the Caribbean women carry a donkey's load on their heads and walk up and down mountains with it'.[154] Obviously then, from Hurston's conclusive tone,

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[151] See: bell hooks, 'talking back', and 'marginality as site of resistance', in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* ed. by Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Cornel West, (New York, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), pp. 337-344.

[152] Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse* (Philadelphia, J. R. Lippincott co., 1938), p. 59.

[153] Dayan (1995), op. cit., p. 127.

[154] Hurston, op. cit., p. 59.

only upper class women of the region do not fit into this group. Even the upper-class women are viewed as different from those in the United States. The West Indian woman is thereby disallowed full agency or voice because she is proven to be 'Other'.

Redirecting the Flow, Rewriting Misrepresentation

Alongside the social historian, the Caribbean fiction writer then takes up the struggle to articulate a story, assert an identity and reclaim a history upon which colonial history and imperialist discourse have foreclosed. Glissant describes this challenge:

> Because the Caribbean notion of time was fixed in the void of an imposed nonhistory, the writer must contribute to reconstituting its tormented chronology: that is, to reveal the creative energy of a didactic reestablished between nature and culture in the Caribbean'.[155]

Perhaps one aim of the writers discussed in this thesis is to render the West Indian grandmother in a positive light, more fitting to lived experience, offering an alternative to overwhelmingly negative stereotypes.[156]

However, as Toni Morrison discusses in 'The Site of Memory', another problem arises: the disallowance of the Caribbean individual to write his/her own history.[157] Such was the case with slave narratives. Because the slave narratives were often sponsored by a wealthy person,[158] the enslaved or freed people writing them felt obliged to keep unpleasant issues out of the text, or they were edited out by those in charge. Morrison discusses the fact that fiction is often seen as an untruth. But, in all actuality, it holds a great deal of truth. According to Morrison's thesis, some earlier writers argue that certain issues are unmentionable. They therefore side-step issues which they consider too crude for public discussion or simply too painful to be written about.[159] She continues: 'In shaping the experience to make it palatable for those who were in a position to alleviate it, they were silent

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155 Glissant (1989), op. cit., p. 65.

156 For further discussion on these negative stereotypes see: Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein, eds, *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Portsmouth, Heinemann, 1997); Jennifer Fleischner *Mastering Slavery: Memory, Family, and Identity in Women's Slave Narratives* (New York, New York UP, 1996); David Barry Gasper and Darlene Clark Hine, eds, *More than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* (Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1996); Hilary McD Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715* (Knoxville, Tennessee UP, 1989); Hilary McD. Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 1989).

157 See: Toni Morrison, 'The Site of Memory', in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* ed. by Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Cornel West, (New York, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), pp.299-305.

158 This is particularly true of those written in North America. See: Morrison's discussion.

159 See: Particularly p. 301 for details of Morrison's argument.

about many things, and they "forgot" many other things'.[160] One issue that was side-stepped was sexual exploitation. This moving away from the plain truth as they lived it was, arguably, because so much of history was so overwhelmingly negative for the oppressed that some would rather circumvent the unpleasant descriptions of sexual exploitation and silencing in the name of tact or good taste.[161] This, unfortunately, allowed for the continuation of erasure, furthering the projection of its paradigm of Caribbean female exoticism.

Considering silences is significant in a time when the power to speak is guarded fiercely by those in control and even later when Caribbean women, as Romero argues above, are still not invited into the realm of discourse formation.

Language controls powerful implications. The Caribbean and once enslaved woman's manoeuvring around language is then significant as she attempts to assert herself over the colonial master's space as disavowed silence. Gikandi seemingly disagrees with Spivak's subaltern thesis when he argues that: 'even when you speak against the culture of colonialism, you speak its language because it is what constitutes what you are'.[162] Notwithstanding that, these women use their colonizer's language to empower themselves, appropriating it so that the language no longer belongs solely to the master discourse. They therefore create a language of resistance. Once again, Besson develops this trend in women's resistance which, she argues, Wilson 'overlooked'.

> Women's dominant role in resistance based on words was reflected in the fact that female slaves were more often regarded as "deserving" punishment than men and in the arguments against abolishing flogging, especially for women. As Mathurin (1975:18) notes, slave women's words not only took up their masters' time and disrupted work, but also forced on them the consciousness of the humanity of the slave.[163]

Mathurin further emphasises this point, demonstrating the oversimplification that Wilson undertakes when he argues for a subdued acceptance of the role of the woman in slavery and post-slavery society. Instead, words are her tools of resistance. With these tools she became a master craftswoman.

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160 Morrison, Ibid. p. 301.

161 See: Moira Ferguson's 'Introduction' *The History of Mary Prince.*

162 Gikandi (1996). p. 142

163 Besson, p. 29

> By refusing to accept slavery like dumb animals, by regularly raising their voices, women in their way, forced their presence on the consciousness of many: this was the thin end of the wedge in undermining the system of slavery. For once the slave is seen or heard, as a human being, it becomes increasingly difficult to justify his or her existence as chattel.[164]

Mathurin's illustration of the problems that occur once speech is given to chattel, or once the chattel is heard is also illustrated in a more general manner. 'When the other speaks, he or she becomes another subject, which must be consciously registered as a problem by the imperial or the metropolitan subject'.[165]

The need to keep this from happening is implicit in the power struggle around superiority and subservience. The slave woman was perhaps aware of this and insisted that she would subvert this erasure by speaking. Thus, her tongue becomes a weapon. Bush also argues that the enslaved woman used her tongue as a weapon against the enclosure of domination imposed on her.[166] This was her form of counter discourse or poetics and a part of the formation of a culture of resistance.[167]

> It was this cultural strength [. . .] which helped women resist the system in their more 'public' lives as workers. In the fields cultural defiance was expressed through language and song. Language in particular was an important element in black identity and cultural unity, a major form of deference against dehumanization. [. . .] Women field hands were experts in the use of the rich Creole language which, with its *double-entendres* and satire, was frequently employed as subtle abuse of whites. [. . .] Through such channels women helped to generate and sustain the general spirit of resistance.[168]

That stated, the importance of 'woman resistance' as a weapon against slavery is crystallised in Bush's evidence. Bush also focuses on the slave woman

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164 Mathurin, (1975, p. 18), as quoted in Besson, p. 29.

165 Fredrick Jameson, "Modernism and Imperialism" quoted in Gikandi, (1996), op. cit. p. 119.

166 See Bush, (1985).

167 Glissant (1989).

168 Bush, (1985), p. 34

as agent of resistance through motherhood, as 'the retention of her traditional role as a mother represented a feat of cultural resistance'.[169] Thus, with all her strong language and resistant character she would necessarily incur the wrath of the slave master. By inculcating in him and the slave mistress the fact of her humanity she exposes herself to further marginalisation. Yet she triumphs, for she establishes her voice as a weapon.

The revalorisation of the black woman's voice allows for a radical redirection of the narrative. This revalorisation can be seen as a postcolonial approach. And, it is precisely through the use of a combination of theories and male and female authored texts that a fuller story can be read and the term 'postcolonial' can be applied not as a marker of time or political independence but rather as a marker of narrative redirection, asserting separation from the realm of colonial discourse. According to Hulme:

> If "post-colonial" is a useful word, then it refers to a *process* of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome which takes many forms and is probably inescapable for all those whose worlds have been marked by that set of phenomena: "post-colonial" is (or should be) a descriptive not an evaluative term.[170]

This thesis sees postcolonial as a process that is descriptive. In this way, postcolonial can be used to describe the writers' project to liberate themselves. That is to say that it marks writers from the region redirecting the discourse so that they are allowed to depict themselves, their realities, and their understanding of history.[171] They are thereby asserting a presence in a gap where history has limited them to the status of objectified and represented 'Other'. The writers are thus carving out a space for themselves that illustrates their contesting of negative

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169 Bush, (1990), p. 104

170 Peter Hulme, 'Including America', Ariel, 26, 1, 1995, quoted also in Stuart Hall, When was 'the post-colonial'? Thinking at the limit' in *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies Divided Horizons* ed. by Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti, (London, Routledge, 1996), p. 246.

171 For further discussion on and problems with definitions of the postcolonial see: Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London, Routledge, 1989); Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London, Routledge, 1995); Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds. *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London, Routledge, 1998); Anne McClintock, 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Postcolonialism' in Barker et. al. eds. pp. 253-266; *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York, Routledge, 1995); Stuart Hall (1996), op. cit., pp. 242-260

historical representation. Stuart Hall sees the postcolonial as 'going beyond the colonial'.[172]

Edward Said states: 'These issues were reflected, contested, and, even for a time, decided in narrative. As one critic has suggested, nations themselves are narrations'.[173] On one level, the community is made up of a composite of the novels penned by Joseph Zobel, or Cristina García, for example.[174] Said suggests: 'The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism'.[175] In this way, then, a counter discourse resists marginalisation. Perhaps that is why 'the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment mobilised people in the colonial world to rise up and throw off imperial subjugation'.[176]

This, for the purposes of this study, can be seen as a postcolonial approach. 'History' Torres-Saillant states: 'goes hand in hand with myth, taken as the first given of the historical consciousness. In that sense, history and myth fuse in the region's literature to rescue Caribbean culture by bringing its people's true legacy to the foreground'.[177] Catherine Hall expands the point: 'So out of traditions and myths which were available new fictions and new histories were constructed, telling stories of new identities for men and women'.[178] The grandmother not only allows but encourages or insists upon this foregrounding of Caribbeanness. This fact then insists on the possibility of articulating one's own experiences beyond the Western canon. 'Caribbean writers present themselves thematically and formally in contradistinction to their counterparts in the Western metropolis'.[179] Therefore, the

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172 Stuart Hall (1996), op. cit., p. 253.

173 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1994), p. xiii.

174 Zobel (1957); García (1992).

175 Said (1994), op. cit., p. xiii.

176 Ibid.

177 Torres-Saillant (1997), op. cit., p. 91.

178 Catherine Hall, 'Histories, Empires and the Post-Colonial Moment', in Chambers and Curti eds. p. 69.

179 Torres-Saillant (1997), op. cit., p. 91.

writer's contesting of their silence and limited representation in historical narrative is here taken as a postcolonial approach.

The idea of postcolonialism as applied here can be seen, therefore, as liberatory in nature, countering the grandmother's lack of importance. Within this postcolonial context, asserting *antillanité* and difference goes along with focusing on the grandmother's role as a primary source. The grandmother's intricate involvement in Antillian culture is also underscored by Micheline Rice-Maximin:

> La grand-mère aussi porte en elle la mémoire commune, racontée sur les plantations comme sur les mornes du marronage, et aujourd'hui encore elle conte ces contes, dit ces comptines, lance ces devinettes, chante ces chansons qui ont bercé et bercent souvent encore l'enfance antillaise.[180]

As Rice-Maximin illustrates, the grandmother subverts the colonial controls levied on words, using her stories to continue the thread of her assumed lost histories. She thereby ensures that a tale is not erased along the way, as Minh-ha would also maintain.[181] Arguably then, these are the tools that allow writers to bring the people's agency to the foreground.

> La grand-mère était donc bien la première maîtresse, le premier livre de littérature, celle qui à sa manière a toujours veillé à l'éducation, l'instruction, les distractions, tout en transmettant l'héritage d'Afrique quelque peu transformé sous l'esclavage. En effet, sur les plantations elle était la source principale du savoir (. . .) et de la culture'.[182]

The grandmother's importance is exemplified by M'man Tine in Zobel's novel, *La Rue Cases-Nègres*. The story or the sources which she carries within her move beyond the barriers of the plantation and are transcribed into literary texts which articulate a viable alternative to the once overwhelmingly dominant discourse. Perhaps the uncovering of this evidence is one of the benefits of working across genres and disciplines which cultural studies is meant to achieve: a transgressing of the boundaries erected between literature, history, sociology, for example, and the

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180 Micheline Rice-Maximin, *Karukéra: Présence littéraire de la Guadeloupe* (New York, Peter Lang, 1998), p. 14.

181 Trinh, T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other* (Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1989).

182 Rice-Maximin (1998), op. cit., p. 14.

conflating of the distinct studies under one rubric, as Glissant argues, will allow for 'a daring new methodology'.[183]

Autobiography and Historical Connections

A distinction is made between the novels as fictions, and the autobiography and the memoirs written, and interviews which the writers have given. The grandmother characters in the novels, although they may be based on real people, are of course constructs of the imagination. However, memoirs are more like to be a close link to lived experience and therefore can be employed to illustrate how history and historical events have had an impact on the lives of the authors and may also have a great deal of influence over their work.

This can be seen in Pablo Medina's *Exiled Memories: A Cuban Childhood* which presents Medina's memories of his youth in Cuba. This is read alongside Virgil Suárez's *Spared Angola,* and Flor Fernández Barrios *Blessed by Thunder: Memoir of a Cuban Girlhood*. All three writers assert that their grandmothers were their primary teachers. Fernández Barrios offers sketches of her relationship with both paternal and maternal grandmothers. She points out how they passed on their healing skills to her, and gave her the strength to survive in a difficult Cuba. Medina focuses more on the relationship with his *bisabuela* Mamamía who functions as the centre for the entire family. She also drew him into her stories so that history came alive for him. Suárez argues that his grandmother gave him the gift of language in order to name things. 'My grandmother helped me to exercise my imagination [. . .] Thus I consider her my first mentor. Not only did she help me to get started by telling me stories, but she also taught me the ways to listen to sounds [. . .] She was the first person who taught me to see'.[184]

All illustrate the profound role these women played in their lives and also in the formation of their characters. Fernández Barrios states:

> I felt guided by the spirits of Carmen and grandmother Patricia. I was on my way to rediscover a tradition in which women healers were able to cut through the body without surgical knives. Their hands,

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183 Glissant (1989), op. cit., p. 65.

184 Virgil Suárez, *Spared Agola: Memories of a Cuban-American childhood* (Houston, Arte Público Press, 1997), p. 79.

> their intuition and their connection to spirit were their only tools and means.[185]

Both writers argue that they can hear their grandmother's voice posthumously. Fernández writes: '[Grandmother Patricia] was there holding the line as she had promised me before I left Cuba. She was the anchor, the old tree deeply rooted to the heart of the earth'.[186] She articulates her re-connection to her grandmother as: 'Grandmother's voice was becoming clear and vibrant inside my head. The voice I had forgotten was coming back to remind me, to awaken the memories of my own stories'.[187]

It is precisely this emotion that the thesis explores. It is this depth of connection to the grandmother in real life and how it carries over into the literary reproduction that is so important here. In concluding she observes that her grandmother says to her: '"Negrita, you are not alone, cariño. We are all her with you forever and ever'.[188] Similarly, Suárez states that: 'At night, I prayed and listened, and from outside, as the rain fell at night, I swear I could hear her voice, susurrus beckoning me to dream and imagine'.[189] Pablo Medina offers his *bisabuela's* influence on him in a different manner:

> I learned of Mamamía's life in the afternoons after school. I'd sit on the cool tile floor next to her rocking chair and she would rock herself into the past and narrate her memories. It was history come alive for me. . . The textbooks gave me names and dates; her stories gave me pictures.[190]

Concretely elucidated is the profound impact these women had on their grandchildren. Significantly, this link exists across the Caribbean. It would therefore be consistent with this theme on which Simone Schwarz-Bart herself focuses: the importance of elder women. In an interview about her work, the interviewer states:

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185 Flor Fernández Barrios, *Blessed by Thunder: Memoir of a Cuban Girlhood* (Seattle, Seal Press, 1999), p. 231

186 Ibid., p. 231.

187 Ibid., p. 236.

188 Fernández Barrios, op. cit., p. 237.

189 Suárez, op. cit., p. 81.

190 Pablo Medina, *Exiled Memories: A Cuban Childhood* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 88.

'j'ai l'impression que les personnes qui ont marqué votre enfance sont toujours très preséntes dans votre esprit [. . .]'[191] to which the author responds:

> C'est normal, puisque ce sont ces personnes qui m'ont tout donné, qui m'ont apporté mon identité en tant qu'être humain. Il y avait alors des références, un rituel, on ne faisait ni disait n'import quoi. La vie en société avait sa vraie signification.[192]

The significance of the connection is firmly established in the relationship Télumée has with her grandmother and the elders in their community. The elders become the foundation on which identity is constructed.[193] Schwarz-Bart affirms that her identity is strongly rooted in these people in her community. Perhaps it is for this reason that the writer has created such intimate links and balance between Télumée and her female elders. In so doing she has honoured the strength of tradition that lives in these women.

The interviewer then attempts to concretely establish the relation between life and writing and the reason the writer would conjure up such melancholy in her text: *'Vous nous en parlez avec beaucoup de mélancolie. Avec* ***Pluie et vent. . . il y avait une grande-mère qui est peut-être en relation avec la vôtre'*** *?*[194] Schwarz-Bart affirms that there is a link between the women in her work and her grandmother in reality.

> Oui, mais je parle avec mélancolie de ces personnes parce qu'elles ne sont plus. [. . .] Je suis mélancolique de par la condition éphémère des personnes que je considère comme immortelles, même si dans la réalité ce n' est pas le cas [. . .] Je dirai que j'ai cotoyé des magiciens, des transformateurs de vie.[195]

Immortality, however, can be extended to include the transference of themselves and their teaching to their grandchildren. By so doing they become spiritually immortal but remain physically mortal. She locates her novel in the realm of oral history with

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191 Catherine Le Pelletier, *Encre Noire: La Langue en liberté.* (Paris, IBIS Rouge Editions, 1998). p. 159.

192 Ibid. p, 159.

193 See; John R. Gillis, 'Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship', in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* ed. by John R. Gillis. (Princeton, Princeton UP, 1994.), p. 3.

194 Ibid. p. 159.

195 Ibid. p. 159.

the grandmother and her female kin, the source, as the axis around which the tale spins. This trend varies however slightly from country to country.

The Anglophone Islands

Works produced as far afield as Jamaica and Belize and greatly divergent spaces as Martinique and Barbados are presented here. It is important to note that each country or island would have undergone its particular struggle for self-government or an independent identity at a specific time. The anglophone region, as a whole, is distinct from the rest of the Caribbean as emancipation took place in 1838. In addition, independence for some of the islands began to occur from 1962.

While achieving independence at different times, Jamaica and Barbados proved two of the region's most important sugar and rum producers. Their relatively strong economies did not mean though that there was employment for all. Many young people, as Foster's *Island Wings* suggests, sought the supposed prosperity of the metropolis. These countries have continued to experience a great deal of migration, particularly male-out-migration. Many unskilled men continue to seek work on the 'projects', from where they can return with American dollars.[196]

With something of a volatile social environment, due to high inflation and unemployment, and political turmoil, Jamaica has become known as one of the Anglophone region's less tranquil countries. Many of the country's youth, therefore, look to North America for their future. As a result of this, many of the young writers from Jamaica and also Barbados are now located outside the region. Both countries have been transformed into tourist havens, which provides a large percentage of their annual income. This fact has also caused a shift in their social realities, resulting in a more service orientated economy.

Belize, though, has a different history. It is the site of contestation, with Guatemala, Britain, and Mexico all fighting for it. Many skirmishes have led to the space being occupied by British forces for far longer than many of the other Anglophone territories. The cultural influences within the country are therefore many and varied and there are far more languages co-existing within Belize than there are in Jamaica, for example. These struggles were often also played out in the writing, as Said points out in *Culture and Imperialism*.

'Projects' refers to temporary employment often offered during cane cutting season in Florida, for example, or other manual labour as seen during the construction of the Panama canal.

The anglophone countries considered herein are from a divergent group from the francophone territories because of their political independence. They are also distinct from the reality lived by those who describe the Hispanic experience as they are not forcibly exiled from their homes as the Cuban-exile writers are. But they articulate a commonality of exploitation and oppression.

Through characters like Pavana and Luz Marina, Belizean writer Zee Edgell provides a voice for disenfranchised women, while deconstructing the image of a silenced subaltern by illustrating that, often through the grandmother's insistence, even though hostility exists, women do not simply surrender to its crippling effects. She claims:

> I wanted to record my point of view – from this writer's perspective – what I thought I had seen. Not necessarily what was, but what I thought I had seen. It was there. We don't have a history written by the Belizeans yet, so that I wasn't in any position to write a history, but I felt that history was sufficient to write a novel.[197]

The writer allows for the conflation of history and literature but does not privilege one over the other, nor does she claim truth for her story. She only states she is illustrating what she thinks she has seen and in no way claims to be an authority on the issues presented; she rather makes an effort to put Belizean's voices into a story of Belize. This attempt would have met with considerable resistance in earlier epochs.

Edgell illustrates how female communities or networks aid women to withstand marginalisation and hardship. The women in her texts draw together to make their inner world a place where they find the support and strength they need to survive and continue to fight in a hostile patriarchal world. Their oppositional political struggle requires them to transgress or move out of their place,[198] or their assumed place of subalternity and silence. The women in the anglophone texts are linked in poverty, and often, single-parenthood, and in their marginality that is compounded by their ethnicity and gender. Their fight is seen '[i]nitially then [. . .] [as] a defiant political gesture'.[199] In Edgell's novels the assumption made by the male is that the woman must accept his abusive behaviour and act according to his

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197 Gay Willentz, 'One Life is not Enough': An Interview with Zee Edgell', Obsidian II, 9:2 (Fall/Winter 1994) p. 31.

198 See: bell hooks (1990); and Rosemary George (1996), op. cit., p. 30.

199 Ibid., p. 30.

expectations. This is not dissimilar in Jamaica or in Barbados, as the other writers illustrate, and it is often a male dominant role that is encouraged by women.

Hispanic Differences

The exile experience plays another essential role in the capturing of the grandmother as an archetypal presence. The rhythm of her primary importance continues in the works of Cristina García and Pablo Medina. Their works form a significant specificity in this thesis because they re-construct with such poignancy the world that they have left behind in Cuba after the Cuban revolution of 1959. The revolution comes after a relatively short spell of freedom as regards slavery. Cuba was the second latest in the region to grant emancipation to its slaves; only doing so in 1886. Brazil was the only country that outlasted Cuba, slavery ending in 1888.

While this has implications for the enslaved person's desire to remain free, it also has a tremendous impact on the African cultural retention that is still present in the country, and the high level of cultural syncreticim or creolisation therein. The Spanish American War and the resultant United States occupation that lasted until the Castro revolution would have also had a tremendous impact on the country's cultural production. The said revolution was seen as a possible escape from the years of tyranny that were lived under previous dictators, similar to the United States backed Fulgencio Batista regime.

Colour politics are of extreme importance in Cuba, an island where Spaniards remained as pure as possible while amassing a fortune, and blacks often remained poor, the servant class to rich Spaniards/Cubans. The possibility of breaking down the colour barrier, dismantling a highly stratified and oligarchic society, and empowering the impoverished masses that Fidel Castro promised, called people into action. Space and yearning become very important here as there is such an incredible nostalgia present in the Cuban exile experience. Yi-Fu Tuan argues that:

> Intimate experiences lie buried in our innermost being so that not only do we lack the words to give them form, but often we are not even aware of them. When, for some reason, they flash to the surface of our consciousness they evince a poignancy that the more deliberative acts—the actively sought experiences—cannot match.[200]

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200 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1977), pp. 136-137.

This has a direct impact on the writers within the exile community. They have an experience with the grandmother that is so tightly bound up in home that she becomes home for them. Tuan states it succinctly when he observes of homeland:

> Home is the center of an astronomically determined spatial system [. . .] The stars are perceived to move around one's abode; home is the focal point of a cosmic structure. Such a conception of space ought to give it supreme value; to abandon it would be hard to imagine. Should destruction occur we may reasonably conclude that the people would be thoroughly demoralized, since the ruin of their settlement implies the ruin of their cosmos.[201]

This is very much a part of the exile experience. This sentiment is then bound to the grandmother who would take over as the embodiment of home in lieu of the physical place. The writings are, for the most part, politically charged with anti-Castro sentiment. García does, however, manage to move beyond the constricts of politics to allow the family dynamic to come through.

French Specificities: Martinique and Guadeloupe as Occupied Space

Martinican writer Patrick Chamoiseau entitles one of his novels *Écrire en pays dominée*, a phrase referring to a country where the people are made to live under constant and continual political control motivated from beyond their national limits or geographical boundaries.[202] The problem with the term *national* in the French Caribbean, hinted at in Chamoiseau's title, is that there are no national lines in Guadeloupe and Martinique. These islands are a part of France and are referred to as *les départements d'outre-mer*.[203] This reality came into effect in 1946 and effectively separated the French islands from the rest of the Caribbean.

Departmentalisation came less than one hundred years after the islands were emancipated from slavery, as the French Caribbean did not liberate its slaves until 1848. There would, therefore, still be survivors within the community during the time of *assimilation*, who could remember slavery. The independence movements in Martinique and Guadeloupe were seemingly stamped out. Life in the islands was made extremely difficult by the troops sent in during the unrest of 1940 when

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201 Tuan (1977), op. cit., p. 149.

202 Patrick Chamoiseau, *Écrire en pays dominé* (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1997).

203 See: Robert Deville et Nicolas Georges, Les Départements d'outre-mer: L'autre décolonisation (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1996).

General de Gaulle established a blockade of the islands. But the victory of *departmentalisation* allowed for a new prosperity, even if less autonomy. This means that the inhabitants of these islands are French and that there is free movement between these territories and the *mère patrie*. This also means that they have been subsumed under that all-encompassing nationality.

It is from this cultural reality that Zobel's and Schwarz-Bart's novels arise. They readopt the creole or Antillian aspect of their lives and include it in their texts. It is a form of cultural revalidation that would have resulted from such a concerted effort on the part of the *mère patrie* to erase all articulations of alternative realities. In Haiti, however, the situation is distinct. Haiti is literally occupied by American and United Nations troops to ensure a democracy is established and maintained in the aftermath of the American backed Duvalier dictatorship, and the various *coups d'états* that followed and the end of president Jean-Bertrand Aristide's first term in office. The United States has occupied Haiti at various times, setting up governments and presidents before leaving them to govern themselves as an independent autonomous country. The Haitian revolution of 1804, which made the country a republic, was a shock to the colonial world. Haiti was seen as a victory for black people and proof that colonisation, white against black brutality, and externally imposed inferiority could be overcome. The French were scandalised by this victory. They tried to squash the Haitian revolution because it would encourage their other territories to strive for similar ends and thereby jeopardise their financial prosperity which depended so much on their colonies.

Although this work is concerned with reading across national lines for a fuller understanding of Caribbean repetition and similarity, it is not about deconstructing nationalities and eliding difference. The French term used to capture the positioning of Guadeloupe and Martinique within France is *assimilation*, indicating that there must be a movement from the peripheries to the centre, an adoption of the centre's identity and an expunging of difference from that identity. The individual or communities to be assimilated must move away from their own identities, leaving what is Martinican and Guadeloupean behind in favour of Frenchness. There is, therefore, always a risk of erasure under the assimilation process. The other is swallowed up by the stronger entity or model.

French Caribbean writers, Martinicans and Guadeloupeans, for example, have a particular challenge to express themselves from within the space of Frenchness or French citizenship, which is delimited because of their foreignness or 'Otherness'. Arguably, all French citizens are equal, but this can be challenged by assimilation, where one must become more French in order to be accepted by the

mainstream. Therefore, Martinicans and Guadeloupeans must become more like the centre in order to be full citizens. Succinctly put, they may not retain their Martinicanness if they wish to be fully accepted as French. This necessitates a cultural loss, a devaluation of one culture in favour of another, and subsequently, further alienation.[204] Liberating voices or revoicing silences while of importance in the Antilles as a whole, is particularly important in the French Antilles. Torres-Saillant points out that critics of Caribbean unity would argue that French Caribbean inhabitants have a great 'fidélité' to France. Ironically, many of the writers think otherwise, as Chamoiseau's book title illustrates.[205] Chamoiseau's remarks about living under constant occupation should be considered when reading Caribbean literature written in French or French *Créole*.

Works such as *Leonora: The Buried Story of Guadeloupe* by Dany Bébel-Gisler illustrate the way in which life was lived in the past was not far removed from the way it is described by the authors in their novels.[206] The informant tells of the community's resistance to *assimilation*, the brutality of the French forces to those in opposition to them and the desire to survive. She articulates the horrors of occupation by the French and the lengths to which the community had to go for any degree of autonomy. She also describes the importance of the extended family in the effort to survive in the hardships of the years of severe restrictions imposed by the French government. The writers may not obviously or physically resist occupation or domination, but often the very words they pen re-cast their resistance to false representation, silence, and occupation. This is apparent in *La Rue Cases-Nègres* where, even though, the narrator must be educated in the French schools, he is also educated about Africa. Meanwhile, in *Pluie et vent sur Telumée Miracle*, the narrator adopts a life in the country steeped in African and indigenous healing arts that French colonisation threatens, as it is viewed as mere superstition.

It is therefore not surprising that '[Maryse] Condé has actually traced the birth of an authentic Francophone Caribbean literature to the time "when the West Indians realized that if history had brought them under French rule, this did not

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204 See: Frantz Fanon, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (Paris, Éditions de Seuil, 1952); *The Wretched of the Earth* trans. by Constance Farrington, (New York, Grove Press, 1963); Chamoiseau (1997).

205 See: Chamoiseau (1997).

206 Dany Bébel-Gisler, *Leonora: The Buried Story of Guadeloupe* (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1995).

mean that they should be mere copies of the French people"'.[207] This follows the rules of subversion or what Homi Bhabha refers to as mimicry, where inherent in slaves' copying of the master is an awareness that they cannot be him, though they almost can. In 'almost' there is a significant amount of power because although they may appear to be submissive, there is an activity that lays hidden under the surface. This, Bhabha argues, is a form of resistance.[208] They will, however, use the master's tools to overturn his control over them. By enacting a subservient role that assumes quiet acceptance, the colonised 'Other' may once again regain a degree of agency in her life.[209] Meanwhile, this may create mental imbalances and cause a crisis of identity as elucidated by Franz Fanon. Thus, while writing within the space of Frenchness these writers use their characters to assert a sense of self that disallows invisibility. Even though they are dominated, they continue to write against this domination. This trend then once again continues the thread of commonality throughout the region.

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207 Torres-Sailiant, Ibid., p. 42.

208 See: Homi Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', in (1994), op. cit., pp. 85-92.

209 See Louis James's discussion of this in 'Introduction' to Alvin Bennett's *God the Stonebreaker*

Gender significance in Relationships with the Grandmother

In order to better illustrate the commonality of Caribbean narrative this work, as stated above, conflates readings of male and female-authored texts. Gender or gendered constructs are a significant consideration upon reading the literature. Beverley Ormerod points out that female writers often render a more sympathetic picture of the grandmother than do male writers. [210] Ormerod bases her argument on a comparison of Zobel's and Schwarz-Bart's novels. She examines the characters and their relationships with their grandmothers and with the elders in the community. She feels that José, Zobel's narrator, has an ambivalent relationship with his grandmother.

Because of this ambivalence on the part of the narrator, Zobel's M'man Tine is not entirely an exemplary figure. A more complex portrayal of the elderly woman is offered in Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*. Télumée, the female narrator, expresses love and admiration not only for her grandmother, the heroic Reine Sans Nom, but also for Reine's friend Ma Cia'.[211]

Ormerod argues that Zobel's depiction of M'man Tine is problematic because of the love/hate relationship his narrator, José, has with her. However, the point that Ormerod makes is important, without first juxtaposing *La Rue Cases-Nègres* and *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* and causing the tension between them and by interrogating them together she would perhaps not have been able to draw her conclusions.

This intertextual analysis derives a fuller picture of the dynamic between the writer and his/her material and allows Ormerod to see this richly textured difference. It is, therefore, essential for a fuller understanding of the grandmother's role to encourage the texts to interrogate each other. As many authors write, and as Paule Marshall illustrates, a great deal of knowledge comes from or came from the grandmother.[212]

The granddaughter and grandmother have a very complex relationship—close, affectionate yet rivalrous. I wanted the basic theme of youth and old age to suggest rivalries, dichotomies of a cultural and political nature, having to

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[210] Beverley Ormerod, 'The Representation of Women in French Caribbean Fiction', in Sam Haigh ed. *An Introduction to Caribbean Francophone Writing, Guadeloupe and Martinique* (Oxford, Berg, 1999).

[211] Ormerod, Ibid., p. 104.

[212] See: Paule Marshall, Introduction 'The Making of a Writer: From the Poets in the Kitchen', in *Reena and Other Stories* (New York, The Feminist Press, 1983).

do with the relationship of western civilisation and the Third World. She's an ancestor figure, symbolic for me for the long line of black women and men—African and New World—who made my being possible, and whose spirit I believe continues to animate my life and work. I wish to acknowledge and celebrate them. I am, in a word, an unabashed ancestor worshipper.[213]

The relationship between the grandmother and grandson is distinct from this. The grandmother generally pushes her grandson to achieve success in the outside world. Historically, she did not do the same with her granddaughters.[214] Women were not afforded the same possibilities for success as were men. This would partially explain the tensions felt in Zobel's text as the grandmother becomes somewhat tyrannical when her investment as regards her grandson's success is at stake.

George Lamming captures this dynamic in a most detailed manner in *In the Castle of My Skin*.[215] A reading that reveals these differences can be achieved by juxtaposing texts by men and women writers as well as those separated by language, as done here, and reading them together rather than in isolation, and by so doing elucidating commonalities and differences. By explicitly illustrating the differences between the representations of the grandmother a broader base of knowledge may be gained and the depth of the reading and understanding is deepened.

Therefore, it is safe to argue that the individual story becomes a part of the meta-narrative or the polyrhythmic representation of the group.[216] That is to say, through the writer's articulation in the novels, autobiographies, and essays more details are learned about the regional experience. The grandmother read in these works is often responsible for the construction of individual identity and is usually instrumental in the formulation of a sense of community. It is partly for this reason that this thesis argues that the archetype of the grandmother, in spite of language or geography, is such a significant figure in the formation of a new discourse or, as Glissant terms it, a forced poetics. The remaining chapters will illustrate the grandmother's importance in the various language groups within the region.

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213 Marshall (1983), op. cit., p. 95.

214 For the lack of opportunity open to women in education see: Cecil Foster *Island Wings: A Memoir* (Toronto, HarperCollins, 1998).

215 George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin* (New York, Macmillan, 1953).

216 See: Ormerod (1985), op. cit. p. 137.; See also: Glissant (1989), op. cit., p. 439.

Chapter Two:
'De Longes' Rope Have Ah End': Homespace and Resistance in the Anglophone Caribbean

Brown skin gial, stay home and mind your baby,
Brown skin gial, stay home and mind your baby,
I'm going away in a sailing boat and if I
don't come back, throw away the damn baby![1]

This chapter explores the grandmother rhythm as Anglophone writers perceive her and employs novels as diverse as Jamaican Alvin Bennett's *God the Stonebreaker*,[2] Barbadian-Canadian Cecil Foster's *No Man in the House*,[3] and *Sleep on, Beloved*,[4] and Belizean Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb*,[5] *In Times Like These*[6] and *The Festival of San Joaquin*.[7] They all create strong and memorable grandmother characters.

The writers' literary production spans three decades. Bennett's work is published in the early 1970s. Edgell's works begin to appear in 1982, almost a decade after *God the Stonebreaker*. Foster's first novel, *No Man in the House*, is published in 1992, a decade after Edgell's first novel, *Beka Lamb*. Edgell begins to publish in a period dominated by Anglophone Caribbean male writers such as V. S. Naipaul, George Lamming, Samuel Selvon, C. L. R. James and others—most of whom left their island homes for life in England, often by obtaining a government scholarship to study there. At that time, women were not often given such an opportunity. Foster and Edgell have followed this trend to exile as they reside in Canada and the United States respectively. About Alvin Bennett, little is known. *God the Stonebreaker* is his most recognised work, and perhaps his only novel. He resides in Jamaica. Perhaps exile then provides Foster and Edgell, as it does the Cuban-American writers, a distance that creates nostalgia, but in this case also a critical eye for social trends. Edgell and Foster are actively publishing, like Naipaul and Lamming, who ushered in the 1950s boom in Anglophone West Indian writing.

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[1] Popular Calypso quoted in Edgell (1982), op. cit. p. 148.

[2] Alvin Bennett, *God the Stonebreaker* (London, Heinemann, 1973).

[3] Cecil Foster, *No Man in the House* (New York, Ballantine, 1991).

[4] Foster, *Sleep On Beloved* (New York, One World, 1995).

[5] Zee Edgell, *Beka Lamb* (London, Heinemann, 1982).

[6] Zee Edgell, *In Times Like These* (Oxford, Heinemann, 1991).

[7] Zee Edgell, *The Festival of San Joaquin* (Oxford, Heinemann, 1997). The latter two will be used as secondary texts.

Edgell's work begins to articulate the concerns Caribbean women have that had remained unpronounced by those male writers. She also tells the story from the woman's or girl's perspective and her relationship with the grandmother, which was, until then, limited to depictions presented by Naipaul and other male writers.[8] While the male writers illustrated the problems faced by Caribbean women who often headed their households and the fictional home, Edgell's work is significant as it fills in a blank that allows a deeper understanding of what growing up under colonisation's patriarchal control was like for non-white females. She poignantly describes the exploitation that women face because of their gender and class, while illustrating, as the male writers do, how the grandmother character becomes such an important person in the family's struggle to survive. The grandmother is the one who pushes her offspring to move ahead in life.

Foster, Bennett, and Edgell simultaneously elucidate the similarity, yet specificity, of the Caribbean experience, particularly with the grandmother, across such a wide chronological and geographical space. All three writers share a similar experience with colonialism's controlling education system, to which they draw attention in their works, and the problems of developing a healthy individual identity in the face of overwhelming negativity. They point out how the grandmother characters are there to push the characters to achieve these goals, however impossible success may appear. The writers also explore the hostility that the colonising powers held toward the local, black characters. The latter show how they were separated from their peers, and often their grandmothers and mothers, if they were to leave poverty behind. Education was the only way one could achieve that goal, but it also leads to cultural isolation. Edgell, Foster and Bennett similarly show how the fictional grandmothers work to undermine the idea of female subjugation and silence.

Significantly, while writers like V. S. Naipaul work at showing the fallacy of the stereotypes held of black women, later writers like Edgell concisely deconstruct them by illustrating how it is the same colonial system that tries to re-enforce them. She uses the stories and survival strategies which the grandmother teaches to her female offspring to overcome obstacles. These three writers illustrate that, though separated by water and borders, and although Belize forms a part of Central America, similar experiences are lived under British colonialism and imperialism.

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[8] See: Evelyn O'Callaghan, *Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women* (London, Macmillain, 1993).

The characters must fight because the grandmothers insist that they do so, in order to overcome the image and reality of the tragic brown skin *gial*.

Working with or Challenging the Stereotypes and Patriarchal Control

To be brown skinned was to be better than black. To be lighter brown was to be better than darker brown. To have a brown skinned baby was to be improving one's self or climbing the social colour ladder. To be able to boast that one had made a *brown skin gial* pregnant was self-aggrandising. This was a mark of ownership over a woman. Once she had a baby, she was tied to her home while the man was free to travel.[9] He left the woman holding the baby, often never to return. V.S. Naipaul provides a different side to this story. In *Miguel Street*, Naipaul creates a memorable character, Laura, who loves the young narrator in spite of the fact that she has a number of children of her own.[10] She has eight children by seven different men and is seen to be proud of the fact. Laura is the happy go lucky, always laughing plump woman with an extremely colourful vocabulary who, although poor, finds a way to survive. The entire street is amazed by Laura. Hat describes her as: 'She like Shakespeare when it come to using words'.[11] She lives like this until her eldest daughter comes home and announces that she is pregnant. Everyone thinks Laura will be accepting. However, she screams and hollers and is never the same again. The event destroys her hope. The narrator describes the situation as a solemn time. 'She was an old woman now. She no longer shouted at her children, no longer beat them [. . .] But we never heard Laura say a word of reproach to Lorna. That was terrible. Lorna brought her baby home. There were no chokes about it in the street. Laura's house was a dead, silent house'.[12] Inherent in the description is the realisation of the complete desolation which Laura feels by her daughter's pregnancy. She will become another grandmother who will be left to raise her daughter's child. The narrator also points out that the entire street, which would have otherwise been very boisterous in their jokes about the baby, keeps quiet out of respect and pity for,

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9 See: Boyce Davies (1994), particularly chapter 6 'Mobility, Embodiment and Resistance in Black Women's Writing in the US', pp. 130-151.

10 See: V. S. Naipaul, *Miguel Street* (Middlesex, Penguin, 1959).

11 Naipaul Ibid., p. 85.

12 Naipaul Ibid., p. 91.

and even empathy with, Laura. Her daughter finally commits suicide by drowning herself. Laura never recovers her former jovial manner. Life has repeated itself around her, and it has destroyed her hopes of achieving improvement in the next generation. Laura's house, as the narrator observes is dead, silent; the silence and feeling of death are arguably due to the loss of her hope. As the Caribbean saying goes 'All I have is my hope'. Without this hope, life is hardly worth living. The philosophy applied to the situation when Laura falls apart, according to Hat, is that: 'Life is a helluva thing. You can see trouble coming and you can't do a damn thing to prevent it coming. You just got to sit and watch and wait'.[13] Through irony, Naipaul takes on the damaging stereotype of the Caribbean woman as the lascivious scarlet woman, demonstrating how there may be a grain of truth to the myth, while establishing that there is always more than one truth. He also shows that it would be a mistake to cast the West Indian woman in that role without understanding the cultural codes operating within the culture. The writers herein examined provide an alternative to Naipaul's tragic outcome of women's doomed lives due to illegitimate pregnancies.

In other scenarios, the Caribbean woman is encouraged by her grandmother to forget the immobility that pregnancy once meant and to find a future, in spite of it. Home can be a place where she is either doubly victimised because of her ability to reproduce or it is the place where her mistake is accepted—she is allowed to move on, encouraged by the progressive grandmother. Chastity, until recently, had been used judgementally as either a weapon against non-chaste women or as leverage to be able to marry well. The non-chaste West Indian woman was relegated to suffer marginal existence and delimited possibilities for the rest of her life.[14] However, her role as assumed silent subaltern is changing—neither is she silent nor has she ever been. She is asserting a presence in the face of imposed silence. Perhaps one of the more salient examples of this is Zee Edgell's third novel *The Festival of San Joaquin*.[15] This novel tells the story of a woman, Luz Marina, physically and emotionally abused by her common-law-husband, who tries to defend herself during one of his brutal attacks, but, in the process, kills him. She is put into prison and loses her children to the powerful land-owning husband's family. The message deployed in

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13 Naipaul Ibid., p. 91.

14 See: Woolf (1929); Kincaid (1986, 1989, 1991); Boyce Davies (1994); Bush (1996), for discussions on chastity and women's (in)ability to move with a family. See also: Ferguson (1992); Ferguson (1994).

15 Zee Edgell, *The Festival of San Joaquin* (Oxford, Heinemann, 1997).

the book which mirrors societal beliefs is that he, as a wealthy, land owning man, has the right to beat his common-law wife, but she does not have the right to defend herself. The world turns a blind eye to her victimisation. By the end of the novel, however, she has begun to speak out against the exploitation of the poor by the creole, landed families. She gets out of jail and suffers further victimisation alongside her mother, while trying to establish some sort of agency within their own community. In spite of all the abuse and setbacks in their paths, they insist on speaking for themselves.

They use their home as a site of resistance where they can regroup and gather their forces against the marginalisation that awaits them in the public sphere. Even though their physical location is never constant, as they are always moving and often within rented or borrowed space, it is a space that fits into the term 'scotch'. The space has been spiritually seized by them so that they can inhabit it fully while they are there, in spite of its origins. They have thus developed it as a safe space. Luz Marina is meant to embody the 'brown skin gial' of the calypso. Significantly, her refusal to fulfil this role begins where the girl is meant to throw away her baby; the women in Edgell's novels strive to raise their children in a hostile world. In both *The Festival of San Joaquin* and *In Times Like These*, the female characters do not fall apart when faced by extreme hardship imposed on them and trauma experienced, particularly when ridiculed and abused in the streets, by external forces, because they are ordinary women who have children by wealthy and powerful men of high status. They insist on surviving and they use their homes as a space in which to endow themselves with this power of survival, even if home is transitory. This is symbolic in the sense of deconstructing the barriers between private and public, by using the private as a springboard from which to approach the public scenario equipped for the hostility outside. Also, by attempting to dismantle these barriers, they deconstruct the borders between the personal story and history.

In Edgell's *In Times Like These*, Pavana, the protagonist, has twins by one of the more powerful men in the community. She raises the children almost single handedly, but also insists on having a career and making a name for herself as she works to assert women's rights within her community in Belize. The later two novels illustrate an alternative to the tragic brown skin 'gial' who is destroyed by pregnancy in a hostile male-dominated world as portrayed by Edgell in *Beka Lamb's* Toycie, who breaks-down after becoming pregnant by Emilio. Women like Pavana and Luz Marina insist that attempts to silence them, to marginalise them, to erase their presence, are frustrated as they fight to resist exploitation.

The grandmothers in this literature are the agents of both change and resistance. While, as elders of the community, they value, defend, and adhere to tradition, they also recognise the need to alter or re-valorise these traditions when necessary, thus setting into place the mechanisms for the survival and improvement of future generations. These textual grandmothers provide characters that illustrate the rich satire and irony present in the texts.

In the Anglophone Caribbean, much of the grandmother's activity unfolds within the safe space of home. Here negotiation takes place between the dominant culture and popular culture. In this home space, where the grandmother rules, she decides how to teach her grandchildren the art of survival in the outside world. It is also within this space that she takes a great many of the important decisions that regard her family's activities and future. This home then becomes a place of resistance to the marginalisation and exploitation that she and her offspring face in the wider world.[16] Rosemary Marangoly George argues that 'home' is always political.[17] The grandmother is the guardian in this space and uses it, as bell hooks terms it, as a space to 'participate in the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practice to identify the spaces where one begins the process of revision'.[18] This is at the heart of Alvin Bennett's *God the Stonebreaker*, Cecil Foster's *No Man in the House* and *Sleep on, Beloved* and Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb.*

In these works, the grandmother figure assumes mythical proportions. Grandmothers may appear mythical because they have grown so large, almost larger than life in fiction and in real life perhaps, but this could be read as another paradox, where reality becomes myth and then recreates itself in reality. The supposed mythical self-effacing grandmother becomes the realistic grandmother of mythical dimensions who inhabits the home sphere and lovingly, but forcibly, exacts success from her grandchildren. Her grandchildren then become the conduits, which, through their education and access to the outside world, carry their stories with them and articulate her life and her suffering. Paule Marshall argues that these stories are the beginning of the writer.[19] She observes that the information or stories she gathered

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16 See: Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Post Colonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* (New York, Cambridge UP, 1996); See also: bell hooks, 'Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness', in *Framework*36, 1989, p. 15.

17 George (1996).

18 See: hooks (1989), op. cit., p. 15.

19 See: Paule Marshall, 'Introduction: The Making of a Writer: From the Poets in the Kitchen', in *Reena* op. cit., pp.1-12.

while sitting around the kitchen table listening to the older family members speak provided invaluable material for her writing. So while the stories remain secular in nature, they are also extended out to a whole new audience. The grandmother is similar to these stories in that she moves with them. She behaves in a similar manner to the movements which Benítez-Rojo sees in the Caribbean text:

> In this respect I think that the most perceptible movement that the Caribbean text carries out is, paradoxically, the one that tends to project it outside its generic ambit: a metonymic displacement toward scenic, ritual, and mythological forms.[20]

In this chapter this movement will be taken as the paradoxical rooting in the home, and travel to the metropolis in search of a better future in spite of the increased hardship it entails. Ironically, the grandmothers realise that this continued state of exile will disempower their home and community to a certain extent.[21] They cannot, however, prevent it as self-imposed exile or migration becomes the only viable way to progress. The grandmothers here are figures of authority who encourage their offspring to root themselves in the home, but simultaneously push them to succeed in the wider world. They may never move themselves, but they want the next generations to do better than they were able to do, as seen in Naipaul's Laura.[22] The novels discussed here examine this seeming contradiction that the home place continues to transmit.

The Novels and Setting

Bennett's *God the Stonebreaker* focuses on the ascension of Granny B or GB from the slums of Swine Lane to a middle class suburb of Kingston. She brings up her daughter's son, who is lighter skinned than the rest of the family. The narrator

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20 Benítez-Rojo (1996), op. cit., p. 25

21 For more examples of male-out-migration and migrations in general see: Lamming (1953); Foster (1991); Foster (1995); V. S. Naipaul, *Miguel Street* (Middlesex, Penguin, 1971).

22 In *Writing in Limbo* Simon Gikandi discusses this as regards education; See also: Gikandi (1996); See also: Maryse Condé, *La parole des femmes: Essai sur des romancières des antilles de langue française* (1979), (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1993); Joycelin Massiah, ed. *Women and Education* (Barbados, Institute for Social and Economic Research (Eastern Caribbean), University of the Wet Indies, Cave Hill, 1982); Joyce Cole, 'Official Ideology and the Education of Women in the English-speaking Caribbean, 1835-1945', in *Women and Education* op. cit., pp. 1-34; Kathleen Drayton, 'Introduction: Women and Education', in *Women and Education* op. cit., pp. vii-xiv; Patricia Mohammed, 'Educational attainment of Women in Trinidad-Tobago 1946-1980', in *Women and Education* op. cit., pp. 35-77; Naipaul (1959).

discusses many problems experienced by an uneducated, poor black woman as she fights to be recognised and insists that her grandson do the same. Bennett explores the prejudices and problems of being black in a colonised world and the pitfalls of pigmentocracy. Panty is Granny B's grandson whom her daughter Kate leaves with her when she goes to try to improve her life outside Jamaica. Both women have their children out of wedlock and must deal with these consequences. Bennett illustrates the way intolerance and prejudices perpetuate themselves and are perpetuated by the very people they serve to marginalise. GB must fight to survive in a world that is against her because she is a poor, black, unmarried woman. She moves through various jobs from stonebreaker in the rock quarry, shop operator, Drop Pan Number seller, cleaner, religious leader, or mother of her own church, to organiser of a fund for 'fallen women'. She then privileges her grandson because he is 'light skinned' and male so that he can improve his lot in life. In so doing, she allows him to consume her. According to her friend Sue, Panty is nothing but a bad omen:

> Your mother was a damned fool to bring you into the world since she didn't know your pah. She only caused unnecessary trouble for innocent people like me. Me might as well tell you that me don't like your colour. If you was pure black or pure white, it would be better; but you come-between mulatto people is always ungrateful. GB can afford to bring up a bird to pick out her own eyes. Me is different. Me know that if you once get a chance in life you won't notice poor me; you will despise your own black gran'mother.[23]

Sue's words, then, present a foreshadowing of what Panty will grow into. In an attempt to side-step poverty, GB moves into the parsonage with the English parson, Mr. Allen and his family. She helps keep things clean for the family. She tries to raise Panty in this space using the Parson's sense of morality and subverting it. One of GB's lessons to Panty was:

> A person who walks with head in the air may see stars, but will never find money. It is good to walk with the head down: stars will always be up yonder, but money and good t'ings never on the ground for long.[24]

This is GB's way of surviving in the face of her poverty. She needs to be sure that Panty will be able to survive as well, but more so that he will not be a burden on her. That lesson is followed by her condemning him for taking a pendant that he finds:

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[23] Bennett op. cit., p. 19.

[24] Bennett op. cit., p. 36.

> With a show of self-righteousness and indignation, GB collared Panty and hammered him with her open hand. The heavy blows were accompanied by advice and condemnation. "Let this be the first and the last. Never steal anyt'ing that is not useful to you. You will get into serious trouble if you love useless t'ings. You is a damned t'ief".[25]

The message is that he must only steal things that he can use. The Allens approved of her disciplining Panty, thinking that she was being a good, upright citizen by taking the young man to task for his behaviour. GB's behaviour is always seen as duplicitous. She reinvents her own strategies for survival in the face of racist discrimination, especially within the parsonage. This is illustrated when Mr. Allen says:

> The world will always be indebted to England for what we have done and are doing for the backward peoples [. . .] Some of the people claim that we enslaved their ancestors, but if we did not take them away from their primitive savage conditions, they would still be cannibals now.[26]

Parson Allen upholds the old colonial beliefs, where echoes of Long resound, that all blacks are inferior to Europeans.[27] He and Mrs. Allen constantly struggle to maintain their distance from the blacks while pretending to be their saviours. Mrs Allen's behaviour is also illustrative of the hostile world that GB and Panty inhabit. She tells her daughter Paula:

> You are a white girl and you have special responsibilities, being an English parson's daughter. You must be careful of all coloured people, particularly the boy Panty. Coloured people cannot be trusted; they are all alike. This boy must be kept in his place. That is important.[28]

Panty discovers this double-standard which functions in the Allen's world and is devastated by it. Because of his lighter skin, he assumed that the world would accept him without any reservations or prejudices. Later, he becomes a civil servant, a position open to him because of his colour and education, and progresses through

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25 Bennett op. cit., p. 37.

26 Bennett op. cit., p. 103.

27 See: Edward Long (1972), op. cit., p. 476.

28 Bennett op. cit., p. 104.

the system. He does not have many other options within the colonial system.[29] He is a womaniser and drinker who has an affair with Paula, the Allen's daughter, who becomes pregnant. GB tries to bribe Paula to marry Panty and to keep the baby. Having a white woman marry Panty, and having an even lighter skinned baby would allow her family to gain respectability, even though Panty is a rogue. The home space takes on enormous implications in this work as Bennett demonstrates the dangers faced by GB inside and outside her house. She eventually dies after abandoning her daughter, Kate's house after a fight with Panty and the injuries he causes her, which are probably complicated by her diabetes.

Bennett also illustrates the importance of alternative forms of religion to the community as GB becomes the leader of a spiritual group. Bennett uses an intensely satirical tone throughout the narrative, employing irony to illustrate the means the underprivileged must go to in order to survive in the colonial world.

Cecil Foster's *No Man in the House* deals with similar issues. The novel is set in pre-independence Barbados and illustrates the plight of the blacks to try to move forward. Once again, a grandmother is left alone with her grandsons. Miss Howells is left with Howard, Alvin and Chester when their father goes to England with his wife to look for work. The father in the novel, as the mother in the story 'My Mother', sends packages home for the children in the care of his mother, as well as money to assist with expenses.[30] Eventually, however, the money and other remittances stop arriving and nothing can be learned about the whereabouts of the parents. Foster uses a variation on the 'norm' of women leaving their children with the maternal grandmother as, in this instance, the parents leave their children with the paternal grandmother. Miss Howells raises the three boys in a tiny board house with her two daughters, Pretty and Alma. She must educate, feed, and clothe the boys, and does all that is within her power to ensure that they progress.

Foster explores the discrimination that Miss Howells experiences because there is no man in her house, and the difficult time the family has because they are poor. The daughters work to help support the family. Alma becomes pregnant by her boyfriend who, in turn, leaves for New York, promising that he will send them money and then send for them once he is settled. She never hears from him. The cycle continues to repeat itself. Foster also focuses, as do Bennett and Edgell, on the importance of education in the lives of the boys. He also explores the victimisation

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29 For details, and examples, on possibilities and limitations with an education see: Naipaul (1971); Lamming (1953); Brereton (1989).

30 Velma Pollard, 'My Mother' *Caribbean New Wave: Contemporary Short Stories* ed. by Stewart Brown, (Oxford, Heinemann, 1990), pp. 148-152.

experienced by the family because they want to support a black politician who embodies the island's political awakening.[31] Howard, the protagonist grandson, eventually wins a scholarship to attend high school, which is his only way out of poverty, but then his grandmother is faced with the awful reality that she must now find the money from somewhere to feed and clothe him so that he can succeed there.[32]

Foster approaches his next novel, *Sleep On, Beloved*, from a different perspective. He examines life from the point of view of three generations of poor, Jamaican women. From the first generation, Grandma Nedd remains in Jamaica and takes charge of her granddaughter, Suzanne's, upbringing, after her daughter, Ona, finds herself with an unwanted pregnancy after an affair with a male dancer, not knowing he was married. Ona leaves Jamaica for Toronto to become a live-in domestic.[33] However, she continues to experience sexual exploitation at the hands of her employer's husband and she eventually leaves the position. She marries a man who also brings more hardship into her life and has a son by him. After a few years, she is able to send for her daughter, Suzanne, and tries to bring her up as best as she can in Canada. This is particularly challenging, as Suzanne finds it difficult to relate to Ona. Because Grandma Nedd has raised Suzanne, Suzanne sees her as her mother. The narrator explores the problems of being poor and black in exile in Canada and the hardships faced by the women who have no network, as they would in their countries of origin, to help them get through the difficulties of life and to assist with their children.[34] Often, these women spend their time and energy raising other people's children, while their own grow apart and become distant. This alienation is mentioned in Olive Senior's work, *Working Miracles*, when she interviews an informant who stays with her grandmother. The informant says, when asked who she thought her mother was:

> My grandmother. Because when I was growing up when I came home from school she would be there, wherever I go she was there, and if anything happen she was there. So I thought, really, that was my mother. She never let us call her Mummy, she let us call her Gran or

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31 See, for example: Foster (1991), op. cit., pp. 168-170.

32 See: Ibid., pp.275-277.

33 See: Foster (1995), op. cit., pp. 70-72.

34 See: Ibid., pp. 39-42.

> Granny, whatever she felt like, and she made a statement that she wasn't our mother, right, that she was only our grandmother.[35]

This informant's description of her relationship with her grandmother depicts the relationship Suzanne has with Mira Nedd, and why she is so distant from Ona. Suzanne spends a great deal of time and energy rebelling against Ona and trying to live independently. She begins to associate with a problematic group at school and winds up getting into trouble all the time.[36] Later, she makes her living as an erotic dancer, of which Ona does not approve. Both women are emotionally hurt by each other and cannot find a balance to their relationship, mostly due to their lengthy separation. Suzanne eventually realises that she must accept Ona as her mother and try to understand her. Both women return to the island at different times as they try to reconcile themselves with their pasts and with Myra Nedd. Grandma Nedd becomes ill and subsequently dies, while Suzanne and Ona try to pull their lives back together as best they can. After Ona's husband exposes her to more problems and is eventually arrested one day by police who force their way into Ona's apartment, she becomes mentally unstable and begins preaching and praising around downtown Toronto. She is institutionalised, leaving Suzanne to take charge of her little brother, Telson. At the end of the novel, the community comes together to try to help heal the wounds suffered by Suzanne, Ona and Telson, and to give Suzanne support in her time of need. The similarity between Foster's and Edgell's novels is particularly noticeable here; both portray women's sense of community, as they come together in times of need and distress.

Edgell's first novel, *Beka Lamb*, explores the coming of age of Belize and of the young protagonist, Beka, who lives with her parents, brother, and grandmother in Belize. The home space is headed officially by Mr. Lamb, but, in actuality, the women run the private sphere. These women also have influence in the public sphere as they encourage the political awareness and awakening of the town people. This is particularly evident in Granny Ivy, who is actively involved in the political struggle in Belize.[37] Although she seems to be quiet, she actually initiates change within the community. Edgell illustrates the importance of the grandmother in the family and how the elder female has significant input into her granddaughter's life and wields a great deal of power in the running of the house, albeit quietly. The story explores the

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35 Senior (1991), op. cit., p. 12.

36 See: Foster (1995), op. cit., pp.28-32.

37 See: Ibid., pp. 94-97.

relationship between Beka and her friend, Toycie, a poor girl growing up with her aged aunt, Miss Eila. Toycie becomes pregnant by her boyfriend, Emilio, who, because of colour and class, as well as religion, refuses to marry her.[38] As a result of this, she is kicked out of her convent school and loses herself in internal exile. Toycie then dies during a storm leaving a great hole in Beka's, her Aunt's, and the Lamb family's life.

Beka, who has never been a good student, and who has also had a problem with lying, enters an essay competition at the encouragement of one of the nuns, who insists that things have changed. While it is apparent to all that a black or Creole girl could never win one of these competitions, Granny Ivy, similar to the nun, sees the need to challenge the system even though it may prove fruitless. She also sees the need to maintain some of the old ways. Her strategy is to combine tradition with progress. This conflating of two arguably polar responses to culture would be evidenced in, as Adele S. Newson argues in 'The Fiction of Zee Edgell', 'Edgell['s] use [. . .] [of] memory in order to explain. In keeping wake for Toycie, Beka is attempting to cope with her own development, which is also the story of Toycie's destruction. The wake is a means of remembering and paying respect, but it is also a "a help to the living"'.[39] Granny Ivy is pleasantly surprised when she is proven wrong and Beka wins the contest. This also marks a change in the direction of Beka's life.

The continuation of the theme of maintaining traditions but also reconstructing them, so that they better serve the women who they may have once constricted, is clearly visible in Granny Ivy's character. As Newson states, 'Through her stories, Granny 'always trie[s] to explain the present to Beka with stories about the past'.[40] By turning her gaze to the past and remembering, the grandmother pays homage and preserves the positive aspects of social mores while teaching future generations not to repeat old mistakes.

Edgell conflates the model of motherhood as embodied in all the women in the novel. The novel explores the exploitation of women because of their ability to bear children and also the way in which the system is made to marginalise poor black women. As Beka's grandmother argues, women must be strong in order to survive. Toycie's aunt is an example of what Patricia Hill Collins refers to as 'Other

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38 See: Edgell (1982), op. cit., pp. 108-109.

39 Adele S. Newson, 'The Fiction of Zee Edgell', in *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English.* ed. by Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale, (Houndmills, Macmillian, 1999), p. 190.

40 Newson (1999), op. cit., p. 191.

Mothers'.[41] She is neither Toycie's natural mother nor is she her grandmother. She is rather an elder aunt who stands in for her mother when the latter migrates to the United States. By so doing, she fulfils the role of the grandmother figure. Edgell articulates the need for women to become aware of their realities. As the political situation heats up in Belize, Granny Ivy uses the time to instil in Beka the importance of not giving up because of becoming pregnant and also the need to become involved in the future of the country. Significantly, Granny Ivy is one of the first members of the People's Independence Party, further illustrating her desire to push for self-rule and change. However, she also sees the dire need to keep the link with the past alive. In the novel when Beka's great-grandmother Granny Straker dies, Beka's mother, Lilla, does not want Beka to attend the wake because it betrays an old-fashioned, silly, superstitious outlook. Granny Ivy insists, however, on the importance of the wake and is able to overturn Lilla's decision. Edgell constructs her novel around the strength and teaching the women pass on to Beka. There are three generations of elders present, Miss Lilla, Beka's mother, Granny Ivy Beka's paternal grandmother, and Great Grandmother Straker, her mother's grandmother. 'Each "mother" exerts personal and political influences which help to shape the young girl's way of being in the world, insofar as they each provide models of choice'.[42] Although Granny Straker is never actually seen in the novel, she exerts a great deal of influence over the proceedings as she is the eldest and is thereby an important and significant link to a past under threat of loss through colonialism and development.

Arguably, all the women hope that female marginalisation may be subverted or even deconstructed so that the self-contradictory discourse presented in one of the supporters of the women's centre in *In Times Like These* can be overcome.[43] Some women are convinced that they deserve to be beaten by their husband and they therefore not only permit the beatings, they, at times, encourage them. They feel that beating is a necessary punishment. This belief is illustrated in the words of a woman in one of Pavana's workshops. She says: 'Sometimes I give [. . .] a little trouble [. . .] So my husband has to punish me sometimes, but I deserve it. He punishes me because he loves me'.[44] Obviously then, such beliefs need to be changed and education may be the only way to accomplish this goal. Naipaul also satirises

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41 See: Patricia Hill Collins (1990); Myriam Chancy, *Searching for Safe Spaces* (1997).

42 Newson (1999), op. cit., p. 191.

43 Edgell (1991), op. cit., p. 133.

44 Ibid., p. 195.

another situation similar to that presented in Edgell's work. In *Miguel Street*, Naipaul presents the character of Mrs. Bhakcu.[45] She keeps the cricket bat that her husband uses to beat her clean and well oiled, and when he needs it to beat her, she fetches it for him. This belief seems rather entrenched in the society.

Changing ideas and attitudes would therefore throw the continuation of these practices into question. Education is often aligned with development in the world economy, however, and this conflation may be problematic. It is frequently felt that education is equal to economic and technological expansion in its alienation from traditions, which means leaving behind the old and adopting new ways of life. For, although development is necessary and beneficial, it also has drawbacks. In everyday life, the problem is that the traditional aspects of a culture are often expunged and replaced by a new reality that is little linked to the surrounding culture. Therefore, a reality of rapid progress is often nothing less than 'Westernisation' or deculturation. The suspicions which surround advancement are clearly articulated in Edgell's second novel, *In Times Like These*.[46] Development manifests itself differently in Beka's mother's life. Her's is a change that represents the flourishing of an independent identity.

The evaluation, revalorisation, and adoption of a 'Caribbean' perspective and a move away from European models is problematised in *Beka Lamb*. Lilla is also, at the beginning of the novel, a perfect colonial subject, attempting to reproduce all that is British within her Caribbean space, even if it is requires a great deal more effort than the allowance of local influence to enter her life. By the end of the novel, however, she has come to a point where she is willing to plant crotons, for example,instead of roses, which are more appropriate for the climate. This is a metaphor for a deeper change in her character, representing the re-valuing of a Belizean or indigenous identity over that imposed on the subject through colonial control and occupation. Significantly, it is the combining of the wisdom of generations of women which allows this new sense of identification to be discovered. Edgell goes onto explore similar aspects of the same theme in her next two novels, *In Times Like These* and *The Festival of San Joaquin*. In both, the women must brave the world that refuses to acknowledge their worth. Both novels, like the first, deal with

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45 See: Naipaul's *Miguel Street*.

46 Edgell (1991), op. cit., p. 23.

gender, class, race, and colour.[47] Home in these texts transcends the barrier between private and public spheres.

Common to all the texts is an emphasis on transgression, on 'pushing against oppressive boundaries set by race, sex, and class domination'.[48] Granny Ivy, Miss Howells, GB, and Miss Eila all encourage fighting the oppression which surrounds them. They are well aware that because of their race, sex, and class, they are marginal. These women combat this by insisting that their offspring move beyond these limitations. They challenge the system through quiet but subversive political acts. They utilise their compounds, their yards, their rooms to equip their grandchildren with the tools to succeed. As Grandma Nedd advises Suzanne at the beginning of Foster's *Sleep On, Beloved*: 'You can be in this world, but not part of the world. You can pretend to be one thing if you have to do it to get by'.[49]

Home and Space

Silence is dangerous. These grandmothers use their homespaces, their 'scotch' to refute this fallacy of successfully imposed silence.[50] To consider someone as 'silent' assumes that the person in question has accepted a state of muteness and does not attempt to deconstruct the enclosure in which she finds herself. The characters discussed here do not, however, accept silence, and are portrayed as far from being voiceless. Hegemonic discourse may wish to drown out many voices, but these women, by educating their offspring to speak a language that does not appear in books taught in the official institutions, allow for their stories, their versions of history, and themselves to be liberated.[51] Homespace provides a safe arena for these

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47 Edgell saliently describes female subjugation and exploitation in *In Times Like These* and *The Festival of San Joaquin*; See also: Emilia Ippolito, 'Caribbean Women Writers' Migratory Subjectivity: Jamaica Kincaid', in Stephanie Newell, ed. op. cit., pp. 62-72.

48 Rosemary George (1996), op. cit., p. 30.

49 Foster (1995), op. cit., p. 12.

50 See: arguments on home as safe space by Boyce Davies, 'Introduction: Crossings 'Hearing Black Women's Voices: transgressing Imposed Boundaries', (1995a), op. cit., pp. 3-14; Boyce Davies, 'Introduction: 'Black Women Writing Worlds: textual Production, Dominance, and the critical Voice', (1995b), op. cit., pp. 1-15; 'Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, 'Women in Africa and Her Diaspora: From Marginality to Empowerment', (1995a), op. cit., pp. 15-17.

51 See: Paule Marshall, Introduction: 'The Making of a Writer: From the Poets in the Kitchen'. (1983), op. cit., pp. ; See also Opal Palmer Adisa's *Bake-Face and Other Guava Stories* (Berkeley, Kelsey St. Press, 1986), p. (xii).

voices to be raised or heard as well as a place for rehearsal, before moving beyond that sphere. According to bell hooks:

> Home is that place which enables and promotes varied perspectives, a place where we can discuss new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference. I am waiting for them to stop talking about the 'other', to stop even describing how important it is to be able to speak about difference. It is not just important what we speak but how and why we speak. Often this speech about the other is also a mask, an oppressive talk, hiding gaps, absences, that space where our words would be if we were speaking, if there were silence, if there were. This 'We' is that 'us' in the margins, that 'we' who inhabit marginal space that is not a site of domination but a place of resistance. Enter that space.[52]

Home in Foster's novel, perhaps because it is only a tiny 'scotch', allows these articulations of difference, resistance, and self-expression. It is the marginal site, locked behind zinc pilings where Miss Howells demonstrates her own duality in *No Man in the House*. Her wage and her living are at the mercy of the government, which she supports in the public sphere, but in her sanctuary, as she refers to her home, she encourages her grandchildren to make educated decisions. Although her voice may be absent from the official register, she makes her presence felt, thereby not allowing her position as a poor black woman, or as questionable subaltern to delimit or silence her. Home presents enormous implications in these works from the Anglophone Caribbean as so many of the women are shown to be home bound.[53] Their movements are limited because they are women and because they have children, but they seek to break this pattern by not allowing themselves to be completely marginalised. 'Completely', in this case, is used to signal that there is a significant negotiation. It is not, therefore, an easy silence or marginalisation, but rather a calculated position. As bell hooks argues, being in the margin allows the person to resist marginalisation and/or erasure because it is a space of resistance and not of disempowerment. One of the things that goes along with home is a sense of community and a safe space where these women and their offspring can be themselves or let down the defences established to face the outside world. This home space also provides a place from whence one must move in order to fully realise one's potential. The grandmothers in these novels are the nucleus of the home space. In some cases, the grandmother figure becomes a metaphor for 'home' as the

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52 Bell hooks, 'Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness'. *Framework*. 36 (Special Issue, 'Third Scenario: Theory and the Politics of Location', 1989, pp. 15-24.

53 See: Carole Boyce Davies (1994); Olive Senior (1991); Janet Momsen (1996).

two come to be interdependent, as Tuan illustrates in the previous chapter. Without their presence, there would be no home; they are thereby equated with home and its meaning. In many ways, these women provide all the comforts, security, and love that are synonymous with home. These grandmothers are the shelters that their grandchildren come to when in danger.

Homespace can therefore be argued to function as a kumbla, '(literally a *calabash*, but also denoting "protection" or "camouflage")'.[54] The physical space can thereby provide a camouflage for the subversion which occurs within. Thus, this space is most often a female centred space, as Carole Boyce Davies argues, and it is within its safety that the grandmother shares herself with her grandchildren and children.[55] This considered, home represents multiple signs and conveys a multiplicity of meanings from a space of cramped self-development, when examined in its physical dimension, to a fertile ground for creative expression and resistance to exploitation, when read on a spiritual and metaphysical level:

> The very meaning of "home" changes with the experience of decolonization, of radicalization. At times home is nowhere. At times one knows only extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference. One confronts and accepts dispersal, fragmentation as part of the construction of a new world order that reveals more fully where we are, who we can be, an order that does not demand forgetting.[56]

The textual irony presented here is that while home seems evidently limiting, it can be effectively liberating. This irony and duality is also present in the characters. Even Miss Howells presents a dual character who is submissive and meek in the public sphere, particularly when under threat, but is subversive in her own private world. In Edgell's novel, Beka, in spite of her failure at school, is allowed to go on for another year at the grandmother's insistence and encouragement. Granny Ivy postulates that women need to be educated. In Bennett's narrative, this grounding element of home is also evident. However, home is also location of conflict. It is within this space that the two-headed monster,

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54 John Skinner, *The Stepmother Tongue: An Introduction to New Anglophone Fiction* (Houndmills, Macmillan, 1998), p. 187.

55 See: Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (New York, 1994).

56 bell hooks, *Yearning, Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston, South End Press, 1990), p. 19.

oppression and pronounced determination to succeed, rears up in confusion. GB is the woman of the house but because she defers to Panty and allows him to take over all that she has, she is victimised by his attacks, awful temper, and hatred for her.[57] These grandmothers, although oppressed, are determined to change life for their offspring. It is here that family conflicts are fought and resolved. The grandmother goes on tirades yet speaks loving words. She gives all she has while exacting a high price, and if the child fails to keep pace s/he is punished, often mentally instead of physically.

The weight of the high price that the grandmother, Miss Howell, in *No Man in the House*, pays to get her grandsons out of the jaws of poverty is loaded onto their shoulders. She can give love with one hand while inflicting great pain with the other. Her grandchildren are her investment.[58] By employing reverse psychology and insisting that her grandson will not do well, she hopes to force him to succeed. This is a shared trait of Miss Howell, GB, Granny Ivy, and Miss Eila. These women are painfully aware of their invisibility and of the fact that their only avenue for success is in their investment in their grandchildren. When the family already has nothing to live on, the grandmother cannot afford to pay for an education that may never bear fruit.[59]

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57 Bennett (1964), op. cit., pp. 232-236.

58 See: George Lamming, *In The Castle of My Skin* (New York, Macmillan, 1953). In Lamming's novel, G's mother constantly fights off the possibility that her investment will be thrown away.

59 This is also taken up in chapter four as M'man Tine works herself to exhaustion along with Dalia to ensure that José gets a good education. See: Zobel's *Rue Cases-Nègres*.

The Politics of Colonial Education

Unfortunately, however, and also ironically, the very education that is their salvation from poverty and marginality is that which separates them from their community.[60] John Skinner in *The Stepmother Tongue* observes that 'Language is, of course, not the only means of enforced assimilation; institutionalized religion is another, and, to obtain even a rudimentary education Beka and her companions are forced to attend a Catholic school'.[61] By conflating education and religion, the colonial subject is indoctrinated through the official institutions, sometimes becoming alienated from all that was familiar.

Education itself is culturally specific. The students in many Anglophone Caribbean schools are fed on a diet of '*The Royal Reader, Gentle Jesus Meek and Mild,* Sir Walter Scott, and *Drink to me only with thy eyes*'.[62] The texts are all British. These texts alone signal a cultural alienation as a result of a Eurocentric approach to education. The above books have no relation to the reality lived, nor can the students 'see' any part of their world that bears any resemblance to anything the books describe. The texts are specifically developed around the colonising culture in England and are therefore hegemonic in their approach to education. The education system thereby created a complex relationship with the surroundings. Long's observations which are shared by Joan Dayan are here illustrated, as the colonial education tries to make white hearts housed in black bodies out of the students.[63] Students were expected to discuss matters such as winters in England, about which they knew nothing, or they were expected to understand allusions to daffodils, which they had never seen. There was never any mention of the reality lived just beyond the classroom door. West Indian students had nothing in their own lives with which to identify any of the literary allusions nor did anything that they lived ever form a part of a lesson. In *Snow on the Cane Fields* Judith Raiskin argues this cultural alienation through education as 'snow on the cane fields'.[64] Edward Kamau

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[60] Chapter Four will examine this factor in more detail as it relates to the French Caribbean.

[61] Skinner (1998), op. cit., p. 184.

[62] Mittelholzer *A Morning at the Office* (London, Heinemann, 1950), p. 208.

[63] For examples of this, see: Chapter One; Long (1972); Dayan (1995).

[64] Judith L. Raiskin, *Snow on the Cane Fields: Women's Writing and Creole Subjectivity* (Minneapolis, Minnesota UP, 1996).

Brathwaite states it as: 'Now the cultural adaptation [. . .] is the little child who, instead of writing in an essay, "The snow was falling on the fields of Shropshire" (which is what our children literally were writing until a few years ago [. . .]), wrote "The snow was falling on the canefields"'.[65] In this, Brathwaite's last instance, the students have correctly changed the landscape to include something with which they, as West Indians who have never left the islands, are familiar. They have combined the everyday with something they have only read about, but have never seen. This conflation of snow and canefields would elucidate the fact that the students have no real grasp of what snow is. They have rather learned to recapitulate what they are expected to learn and understand, without truly comprehending. This also evidences that the children do not fit completely into either culture due to the assimilatory process that education imposes on them. Despite the alienating trend in education, it was a necessary 'evil'.

Education is, however, still contingent on skin colour. George Lamming points this out in *In The Castle of My Skin*, as G's mother laments the fact that even though her son has received an education, he is too dark skinned to be able to work in Barclays Bank, while Panty in Bennett's novel can combine his education and his light skin to transgress this barrier. Simply stated, there is no written or official policy on colour, but as Bennett illustrates: 'Commercial banks in Jamaica acknowledge no discrimination regarding race, creed or class amongst customers. It is purely coincidental that bank clerks are white or very fair of skin, sometimes recruited abroad'.[66] This is not restricted to Jamaica, but is a common occurrence on other islands. Lamming articulates the importance given to success in the household in which his narrator grows up. G is raised solely by his mother. She does the job of many of the grandmothers in the texts studied in this chapter. As the narrator points out:

> But my mother was unsparing. She kept harping on the money she had spent on books and uniform and insisted that if I didn't do well at the High School she would consider everything, scholarship and all, a waste of time. Then there was much talk about the opportunities others had had and wasted, and the opportunity which I would now have to make a man of myself. At times she seemed to take it for granted that I wouldn't do well at the High School, and there followed

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65 Edward Kamau Brathwaite, 'English in the Caribbean: Notes on Nation Language and Poetry—An Electronic Lecture'. *English Literature: Opening Up the Canon* ed. by Leslie Fielder and Houston A. Baker Jr. (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1981), p. 19.

66 Bennett (1964), op. cit., p. 200.

> an unbearable monologue which described the way her money and time would flow into Maxwell Pond.[67]

Grandmothers, as does G's mother, instil in their offspring a sense of survival and a desire for success. The grandmothers or guardians continually remind their offspring about the cost, monetary and emotional as well as physical, of their eventual failure. These grandmothers and mothers constantly argue that their charges need to 'pull up their socks' in order to succeed. The grandmother will not be taken for granted. The youngsters' guardians are aware of the double standard that is inherent in the education they insist their offspring receive, but they also realise that, in order to improve their position in life, they must accept this cultural alienation. They, however, simultaneously work to teach their grandchildren about themselves in their home space. This is more palpable in the literature written by women writers such as Zee Edgell and Paule Marshal. The grandmothers and mothers, even if seen as inferior by their offspring because of the gap created by education, still insist on respect and obedience, which creates conflict within the homespace. Boyce Davies writes that:

> bell hooks speaks of "homeplace " in somewhat more nostalgic terms, as a sight of resistance, a place to which one returns for healing and self-renewal. hooks tends to speak of home in both ways. For while home as sight of belonging is true at times, for many the reality is of not being able to return to that space or "homeplace" unless it is an internal center, or a newly constituted home.[68]

This duplicitous reality is imposed on these women, who must in turn impose it on their offspring. They are products of cultural resistance who thus create a counter poetics[69] to a discourse that attempts to deny them the space to breathe except as chattel slave.[70] Lamming's G offers a hint at the difficulties of growing up without a father and also the role his mother played in raising him alone. 'And what did I remember? My father who had only fathered the idea of me had left me the sole liability of my mother who really fathered me. And beyond that my memory

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67 George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*. (New York: Macmillan, 1953). p. 209.

68 Boyce Davies (1994), op. cit. p. 177.

69 See: Glissant's (1989), discussion of Counter-poetics.

70 See: Bush (1990).

was blank'.[71] One of the grandmother's responsibilities is the remembering of the past. She ensures, as the ancestral being, that her offspring remain connected with their cultural reality. Paule Marshall explains:

> During the year that I spent with [my grandmother] a subtle kind of power struggle went on between us. It was as if we both knew, at a level beyond words, that I had come into the world not only to love her and continue her line but to take her very life in order that I might live.[72]

Arguably, the relationship between granddaughter and grandmother is not as competitive as that between mothers and daughters.[73] There is a problem with resentment of discipline that the mother must impose on the daughter, which is absent in the grandmother's relationship with a granddaughter whom she does not have to raise single handedly. Also, there is a slight jealousy between mother and daughter which further complicates their already, often, explosive relationship.

Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* and *Lucy* illustrate the jealousies between mother and daughter for the affections of the father. The relationship with the grandmother is different, however, in that the older woman is not vying for the father's attentions with her granddaughter. There is also a greater gap in age which allows, as Grandma Nedd in *Sleep on, Beloved* argues, more maturity and experience on the part of the grandmother. Furthermore, even if there is a slight struggle between grandmother and granddaughter as Marshall notes, the grandmother provides the granddaughter with an anchor and also a spiritual link that connects the younger woman to the older woman and thereby to the world. Marshall later shares with the reader: 'She died and I lived, but always, to this day even, within the shadow of her death'.[74]

Her grandmother's stories and way of life will always remain with her. Her grandmother was successful in her inscription of herself and her ancestral knowledge on her granddaughter. The grandmother will perpetuate herself and her kin through storytelling and other techniques. She may, however, render her representations

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71 Lamming, op. cit., p. 3.

72 Paule Marshall, *Rena and Other Stories* (New York: Feminist Press, 1983). p. 95.

73 See, for example the dynamics in Jamaica Kincaid, *Annie John* (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1985); *Lucy* (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991); *The Autobiography of My Mother* (New York, Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1995).

74 Ibid. p. 106.

somewhat unrealistically so, that when these writers recall their mothers and their grandmothers, they are no longer ordinary women, but rather huge and mythological beings, somewhat embellished by memory.

The grandmother has had such a sizeable impact on the memory, imagination and life of the grandchild that she subsequently becomes larger than life. She becomes an important archetype in their lives and in the community's imagination. By having spent such a great deal of time with the older woman, the grandchild sees her as intricately connected in all aspects of life. As the grandmother becomes a metaphor for home, she may similarly become a metaphor for life because she gave so much of her own life for the successful development of the younger generation.

Grandmother as a Metaphor for Home

Home is, then, described in many ways. Home can be used as a trope, as there is no fixed location for it or, better still, it can be used in its symbolic terms as a haven from the world outside. It becomes a ritualistic centre, a metonym for many of the issues and aspects of the instruction that occurs therein. Foster, Edgell, and Bennett manipulate the trope of home in all of these ways. In Foster's novel, a similar home space encourages Howard to strive to change his reality. Similarly, Edgell points to home as the space where realisation takes root:

> For the first time, it seemed to her, she saw with unmisted clarity, the rusty water drums, the rotting planks of Miss Eila's house. She allowed herself the truth and understood that the Qualos were very poor, and there was no romance in it. Toycie had provided the enchanted quality in her environment. She was the one who touched each humble item in that yard, embellishing everything with bright sparkles of what she believed could be. Toycie's blazing spirit turned petty financial contrivances into minor adventures, and Beka had chosen to see the Qualo house and yard through Toycie's eyes, and had often envied the fairytale like atmosphere conjured up there, out of almost nothing, before her delighted eyes. These last days, however, the glory of it all had diminished, the spirit of the magician seemed quenched.[75]

Great things can come out of humble surroundings. This home space is where life survival skills are learned and then the grandchildren are deployed to take on the world. They return to the homeplace everyday to be reconnected with the life force inhabiting it. The home is safe and provides energy to move on in life, even if it is

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[75] Edgell (1982), op. cit., p. 98.

built on the master's land as most of the villages were in the days of the plantation. Audre Lorde argues that 'the Master's tools will never dismantle the Master's house'.[76] However, the attempt must be made to do just that.

The multi-vocalic or polyrhythmic literary articulations of this repeating island of marginal existence, of female subjugation, and grandmother-engineered success illustrates how the tools are appropriated by writers. The grandmother, as stonebreaker, puts the stones she breaks into her mouth and uses them as weapons against the oppressors who once enslaved her. She teaches her offspring to speak with these stones so that they 'master' the master's modes of discourse. This act of describing the super-text of traditional representation of the Caribbean is an ongoing struggle as there is always a new imposition of that text onto the un-inscribed West Indian subject.[77] Education is emblematic of this re-inscribing and simultaneous de-scribing as the dominant discourse and ideology. They are all that is taught and therefore the subject must develop a selective relationship with education.[78] Education thus represents further control. Education and family are all that the colonised subject has. Without either, the subject sees her/himself as a futureless soul, who must surrender any agency to survive. National states this clearly in Edgell's *Beka Lamb*. 'You see [. . .] No mother, no father, no school. What can I do'?[79] By encouraging a re-thinking and a challenging of the old ways, women like National have more possibilities and opportunities. This is why the resistance which grandmothers teach in the home is significant in deconstructing delimiting boundaries.

Home Space as Site of Resistance

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76 Audre Lorde, 'The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House' *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Colour*. ed. Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Morraga (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1981). pp. 98-101.

77 See: Chris Tiffin, and Alan Lawson, eds. *De-scribing Empire: Postcolonialism and Textuality* (London, Routledge, 1994).

78 See: Peau Noire, Masques Blancs (Paris, Editions de Seuil, 1952); The Wretched of the Earth trans. by Constance Farrington, (New York, Grove Press, 1963),

79 Edgell (1982). p. 128

Carole Boyce Davies points out that home is 'one of the principle sites of domination and conflict for women'.[80] Home articulates safety as well as danger.[81] But having nowhere else to go other than into her enclosure, the safe space of her home, a black woman must try to venture back to her home. GB, for example, tries to subvert control by turning colonial rules on their heads so that they serve her, but she also returns home to Swine Lane, in the hope of finding safety in her old space after Panty's attack. Miss Howell does not subvert the laws as GB does, but she does encourage the boys to steal sand from the quarry, before going to school in the morning, to lay it in the yard for Christmas, since they could not afford to buy it. GB is the product of the rock quarry; she is a hustler, like Panty. She uses her position at the quarry and her sharp tongue to maintain her position above everyone else. Because she is aware of all that goes on in the quarry, she can pretend to be the overseer's friend and chief worker, setting a good example while he is there, but cutting him down when he is not.[82] This illustrates her dual personality: the eager, complicit subordinate in the Allen's house and also the strong, insistent, conniving woman. The latter is to be fostered to survive.[83] The former is similar to what Mira Nedd advises Suzanne to be in Foster's novel.[84] 'Because you live in a next man country, don't mean you gotta be ungodly like he. [. . .] You can pretend to one thing if you have to do it to get by'.[85] Perhaps the words shared over GB's grave are significant in the larger realm. They articulate the difficulties and the hardships, but also the importance of resistance. Only through resistance can change occur:

> I remember when GB used to be on top of a pile of broken stones at Rockhill. Now she is under this pile of stones as if she had merely fallen from her seat. Stones were part of her life and now follow her to the grave. [. . .] God almighty is a great stonebreaker using some stones to make cathedrals and others to pave gutters. The making of some things is the breaking of other things. Broken stones build

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80 Boyce Davies (1994), op. cit., p. 49.

81 See: bell hooks (1990).

82 Bennett, op. cit., p. 2-3; Bush (1990).

83 Bush (1990).

84 See: Foster (1995), op. cit., p. 12.

85 Foster (1995), op. cit., p. 11/12.

> shelters, broken bones build nations and broken hearts build heaven.
> GB was a good stone.[86]

Arguably, GB is a bad stone in the moral sense of the coloniser in that she disobeys and by so doing, break laws, but it allows her to survive and also to gain recognition in the eyes of the community. It could also be argued that her stone breaking was what facilitated Panty's existence. Perhaps one could also speculate that Panty might change his behaviour in the wake of GB's death. Harry gives a very touching speech for GB. He ironically did not really know the woman. This reflection on GB's life is loaded with irony. She is being recognised as having been a good person and, by extension, a nation builder, but by the time the reader gets to this point, s/he is well aware of the deceit that lies at the foundation of GB's success. She has twisted and connived to escape the ghetto and the oppression involved with it. Harry has been taken in by GB's good side. Neither he nor Kate realises the deep duality GB presented and the extreme irony present in Harry's celebration of GB's hard working, good, honest side, which was shadowed by a scheming and subversive undercurrent.

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86 Bennett, op. cit., p. 246.

Survival Strategies: Anancy the Spider

GB, as Louis James points out in the introduction to Bennett's novel, is a character much like Anancy, the Spider. Anancy is a West African folk hero figure who is present in the West Indian oral tradition. Anancy's only strategy for survival is deceiving, fooling, and tricking people out of what the white inhabitants have in order for the poorer, disenfranchised, black inhabitants to obtain some wealth. Being the smallest and most easily exploited member of society, he must use his wits to survive. As Patrice Proulx argues:

> Le choix de la toile d' araignée comme forme de représentation privilégiée pour signifier le nombre et la diversité des liens intrinsèsques à la communauté peut se concevoir comme une acte subversif. L'image de la toile évoque délibérément celle de son créateur, que les légendes populaires nomment Ananse l'araignée. La rôle d'Ananse, l'homme araignée, surgit des mythes Afro-Antillais. Marie-Denise Shelton révèle que c'est « . . . l'homme araignée à qui la tradition populaire attribue le don de la métamorphose, de la tromperie, et qui représentait, dans l'imagination de l'esclave de l'époque coloniale, l'invincibilité contre les horreurs de l'esclavage.» Ce conte continue en métarécit avec des implications libératrices.[87]

Proulx and Shelton, therefore, point out the importance of the Anancy character in Antillian writing and storytelling. Anancy is the hero spider of many groups in West Africa because of his ability and dexterity in using disadvantage to his advantage. He has been transferred to the Caribbean and has also become a hero. The comparison likening GB to God as stone breaker is pertinent here because, like Anancy, she invents her own morality and rules for existence. Louis James sees it as pure deceit. But there is a need for the deceit, as the characters find no other way of extricating themselves from exploitation:

Deceit becomes a form of attempted magic through imagination. C. L. R. James quotes a slave who is found with stolen potatoes in his shirt, who cries "Eh Master, the Devil is wicked. Put stones, and look, you find potatoes. In a slave story Anancy steals Mongoose's cow, then cuts off the tail and puts it on the ground, crying that the cow is walking into the earth'.[88]

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[87] Patrice J. Proulx, 'Situer le «Moi» Féminin dans *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle'*, in *Elles Écrivent des Antilles (Haïti, Guadeloupe, Martinique,)* ed. by Suzanne Rinne and Joëlle Vitiello, (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1997), p. 138.

[88] [quoted from C. L. R. James *The Black Jacobins* (1963) (London, Allison & Busby, 1994), p. 15.] Louis James p.vi.

GB's behaviour is similar to that slave's and to Anancy's. When Panty steals something that is not easily sold, she scolds him for stealing things that are useless to them. However, Parson Allen assumes that she is scolding him for stealing and is trying to bring him up as a good boy. Harry's judgement of her as a good stone, is in this way understandable, as she manages to deceive everyone with her appearance, her survival strategy. The irony is obvious. This could also be read as a recognition of the need to resist oppression and marginalisation in order to succeed in life. The ironic passage quoted above where Harry is celebrating GB's character is illustrative of the novel as a whole as Bennett articulates the resilience and versatility of the community in surviving varied types of exploitation and marginalisation. Also, rocks can be used as weapons against oppression. But such obvious resistance is not possible for these people as they realise that the control is too systemic and insidious to be able to combat it directly. They are too aware of their marginal position and the hostility of the outer world to be able to succeed with physical resistance. Moreover, for these women, physical resistance is not possible because the hostile world beyond is too strong to be defeated by brute force; instead, cunning is the best option. Although GB's position as stonebreaker is closely linked to slave labour, there is once again a subversion of the master. In order to help herself and her grandson, she must deceive a deceitful authority.

In a mirroring act, GB shows that she can use the coloniser's moral sense to subvert his very own authority. She takes advantage of every opportunity to make her time in church and with the Allens pay off. Parson Allen thinks that GB is a devoted follower as she sits reading her Bible in each service. GB is actually getting hints from the sermon for the Drop Pan numbers game she plays. However, this endears Parson Allen to her. GB realises that she is held in a delimited, marginalised space in the Allen's family and world and they will deny her access beyond the fringes because of Mrs. Allen's belief in the superiority of the whites over the blacks. She must, therefore, exploit an exploitative situation. Her successful rearing of a grandchild is also another weapon she uses to combat the insistent subjugation by the former master.[89] Significantly, Panty can also infiltrate their ranks and undermine their authority position by darkening their race or adding impurity to it.

Women's Solidarity and Survival Strategies

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[89] See: Boyce Davies (1994), op. cit., p. 138.

Similarly, one could assume that Beka, in Edgell's novel, would be the one to de-centre the subjugation of herself and other women. In 'Through an African Feminist Theoretical Lens', Rosalyn Terbog Penn illustrates ways in which women sought to be more independent.[90] These ways or traditions were considered inferior by the colonial reporting gaze.[91] Edgell's novels exemplify these very trends that Terbog Penn discusses.

Perhaps the two most dominant values in African feminist theory, which are traceable through time are: encouraging self-reliance through female networks and developing survival strategies. These values have been institutionalised in many African and African-descended communities. Historically, this combination has not been present in institutionalised forms among females of Euro-centred world societies, but can be traced continually in time among women of African descent in New World societies as well as in Africa.[92]

These values are also seen in Luz Marina's relationship with her mother and the strength and courage that the latter gives to her. It is precisely in the coming together of the women, albeit clandestinely, that they are able to survive exploitation. In the Caribbean, women refer to others in their community as *'comadres, commère,* sister, mother or grandmother' as signs of respect. This also connotes a membership in a congregation of women, where others are considered co-mothers. As Bennett illustrates: 'Middle-aged Jamaican spinster Beatrice Brown demanded the title "Granny B" as a mark of respect since she could not be designated as Mrs. . . . According to her, grandmotherhood was a social rank, hence she insisted that anyone calling her should put a "handle" to her name'.[93] There does not have to be a blood link involved. Carole Boyce Davis refers to the above type relationship between women as **Maccomay,** which she defines as 'French based patois for my co-mother (*ma commère*)'.[94] The term could also signal a relationship between women who are godmothers to each other's children. This signifies a great deal of trust, of co-operation and of mutual sharing. This relationship is particularly important to

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[90] Rosalyn Terbog Penn, 'Through an African Feminist Theoretical Lens: Viewing Caribbean Women's History Cross-Culturally', in *Engendering History* op. cit., pp. 3-19.

[91] See: Hulme (1986); Young (1995); Spurr (1993).

[92] Terbog Penn (1995), op. cit., p. 5.

[93] Bennett op. cit., p. 1.

[94] Boyce Davies (1994), op. cit., p. 196.

poorer women who must rely on their kinship networks in order to survive.[95] The relationship between GB and Sue appears tenuous due to their jealousies and GB's desire for Sue to leave her alone so that people in Kingston would not know of her background. But, be that as it may, they would still fit into the category of *comadres*. Also, Sue and GB's passage through these steps that Penn discusses is clear. This is in spite of GB's ultimately self-centred nature. It could be argued here that Bennett uses irony to criticise the relationship between Sue and GB. He illuminates their inability to eliminate human characteristics such as jealousy from the equation, which naturally results in resistance between two people, even if they are kin or fictive kin. There are still jealousies and the feeling that one has bettered another. [96] Another historical trend evidenced in these novels is the 'self-reliance through female networks [. . .]'[97] which promoted:

> (i) younger women relying on older women (of 40 years old or older); women looking to female kin, fictive kin and cohorts for support; and (iii) redefining household relations which may be primarily female. The second tenet, that of women developing survival imperatives, can be characterised by: (i) resisting oppression; (ii) defining female leadership; and (iii) redefining economic and political roles for women.[98]

This is clearly palpable in Foster's second novel *Sleep on, Beloved* and in Bennett's *God the Stonebreaker*. GB's answer to necessary survival skills is her duplicity and deceit. In Foster's novel, Mira Nedd is the person who makes it possible for Ona to move on. By taking over the guardianship or mothering of Suzanne, she gives her daughter the ability to search for a brighter future in the domestic scheme in Canada. In Edgell's novel, it is through the support and assistance of the Qualo family and others in the community that Miss Eila is able to carry on in the face of the tragedy with Toycie and later, alone, after Toycie's death. GB's only real support, as problematic and full of contradictions as it is, comes from

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95 See explanation of origin: Boyce Davies (1994), op. cit., note 1, p. 196.

96 In the Bahamas the analogy of black and white crabs is used to describe this trend in 'black people'. Old people in the community argue that, once in captivity, black crabs will try their damnedest to pull down the crab that has climbed higher than they have, or try to climb over him. Whereas white crabs, live happily, ignoring, each other, even in captivity. This analogy is frequently applied to people and is the argument for the reason of lack of black progress. This is another illustration of a 'myth' perpetuated.

97 Terbog Penn (1995), op. cit., p. 5.

98 Terbog Penn (1995), op. cit., p. 6.

her friend, Sue. Although Kate does offer her mother all the support she can, GB does not have the same connection with her that she shares with Sue. Also illustrative of Terbog Penn's thesis is the fact that Kate relies on GB to raise Panty. She also returns and provides a female kin network and home that GB can move into. The closeness of the materially-impoverished community is evidenced throughout the texts studied in this chapter. There is always a pulling together in a *communitas* in times of strife. The women become *comadres* in poverty and will help each other to succeed. Toycie and Miss Eila's relationship with the Lamb family exemplifies this. When a sister is in need, there is no question that the other women in the community, even though they themselves may have little to offer, help. Help is provided without even being requested. Even those women most peripheral come out of the shadows to give whatever aid they can. When Toycie falls into the stream, National is the one who rouses everyone to her assistance.[99] Miss Howell's relationship with her neighbour, Mavis Thorpe, is also illustrative of this female kin network; despite their disagreements and Mavis Thorpe's protection of her brother for all his evil deeds, they support each other. The element of jealousy and rivalry is always present, however.

Foster also explores silence as a survival skill. In a scene where the election heats up in the village and the Prescod household once again becomes the centre for exploitation, the grandmother is guarded about her vote: her stance is an attempt at self-preservation and the preservation of her family. The three women in the house have political jobs and one wrong word or deed could jeopardise them. When Howard asks her which way she will vote, she snaps at him because she is painfully aware of her tenuous position and the exploitability of her station. She has more power by keeping quiet. This is a power that she has learned to use to the best of her ability.[100] Thus, her silence, though seemingly imposed from without, is actually a calculated position, using her invisibility to belie a submerged strength and determination of will that appropriates the coloniser's oppressive tools and puts them to work for her.[101] Although the grandmother does her level best to keep herself in everyone's favour and to stay out of the way, she is constantly victimised. Her unbroken position, as the exploited, leads her to say: 'I's just a woman and I

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99 Edgell (1982), op. cit., p. 126-127.

100 See: Foster (1991), op. cit., p. 207-209.

101 Bush (1985); Also, see chapter one for more details.

can't beat up nobody'.[102] Implicit in her words is a subversion of that same power that she does not have. By articulating her powerless stance she is playing into the hand of the oppressor. He thinks of her as being helpless and thereby is gratified when she recognises her own powerlessness to do anything but be subservient to his whims. In this way, she hopes to be able to get off lighter than she would by standing up to him with her usual sharp tongue. As a woman, and more so as an older woman, she cannot physically fight, but her words and the resilience and resistance she imparts to her offspring accomplish more than physical brawn can ever hope to. She is also aware that, although she herself condemns physical violence, at times it is necessary to secure one's rights. The situation is complex. She is oppressed not only because she is a woman. Her situation is aggravated because she is a poor black woman with 'no man in the house'. On the other hand, many women feel they are better off without a man around who will only use them for what they have and leave. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys's character, Christophene, articulates this belief that she shares with many other fictional women: 'Three children I have. One living in this world, each one a different father, but no husband, I thank my God. I keep my money. I don't give it to no worthless man'.[103] With no man in the house and the desire to be self-sufficient, these women must create safe and protective spaces where they can articulate their stories without the fear of being victimised.

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102 Foster (1991), op. cit., p. 134.

103 Jean Rhys , *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Hamondsworth, Penguin, 1966), p. 91.

Looking for Safe Space: Grandmothers and Women Centred Spaces

Houston Baker defines the importance of home space, the calabash, for the black woman as follows:[104]

> In experience the meaning of space often merges with that of place. "Space" is more abstract than "place." What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value. Architects talk about the special qualities of place; they can equally well speak of the locational (place) qualities of space. The ideas "space" and "place" require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.[105]

Safe space is for GB anchored in Swine Lane, the piling protected area that belongs to Miss Howells, and in the bosom of the extended family and fictive kin network for Ganny Ivy and Miss Eila, that is where negotiation of space can occur.[106] This female centred or safe location is extremely important within the clearly demarcated and most certainly delimited space owned by these women. It is there that strength is gathered from taught resistance and survival skill.[107] In *No Man in the House*, Foster explicitly draws the space as a shack surrounded by a weak paling with a broken gate that openness onto the world outside. But subversion grows behind the weak paling. This female-centred space pushes their men to excel in the outside world, and, later, their female offspring as well. However, only extremely progressive women attempt to break the inside/outside success dichotomy, for women are not meant to mention certain issues, which are considered indelicate or simply unspeakable. Miss Howells follows this premise in public and articulates her

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104 Hurston Baker *Working the Spirit* (1991).

105 Baker quotes this from Yi-Fu Tuan in *Space and Place*. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1977. Baker, pp. 71-72.

106 See also: Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetic s of Space* trans. by Maria Jolas, (Boston, Beacon, 1969); Yi-Fu Tuan (1977).

107 See: bell hooks 'Marginality as site of resistance', (1990).

dismay, distrust or fury in the privacy of her yard with only her offspring as witnesses.[108] Boyce Davies writes of a similar experience:

> "***It's not everything you can talk***". The Caribbean women of my childhood would say even as they expressed their feelings around difficult life situations. My godmother would bustle in from a distant town, knowing that in our female-centered household there was space to cry, to talk about difficult marital situations, about having made a terrible choice of a mate, that there was no way of leaving with seven children or leaving seven children with an abusive, alcoholic husband. "***It's not everything you can talk, Maccomay, but*** . . . " became a formula or a code for talk even as it negated complete expression of feelings and of pain. The placement of the conjunction, "but," after the negation of the possibility of full speech signaled a determination to articulate, to challenge, to reveal, to share. For the word ***but*** is more than a conjunction, it is also a subtle mark of opposition.[109]

The oppositional '**talk**' is thus released from the enclosure of woman's safe space and included in her writing and the stories that her offspring tell. Edgell illuminates this liberation of the voice, of the oppositional, when she has her characters deconstruct the established schemas and de-centre the Euro-American male centred discourse. They develop a sense of an individuality and identity that had been denied them before. In Foster's novels, it is obvious that this space is provided by the house or home place that belongs to the grandmothers. In *No Man in the House*, Miss Howell is attacked in her garden by the politicians out to drum up support for themselves and their party.[110] When accused of encouraging dissent in the ranks, Miss Howell offers: 'We don't support no political party that I know 'bout. In this house, I's still the head, the one that decides things. I'm the man in this house'.[111] After this statement, Miss Howell's response to the attack is:

> Who does that prissy Leroy Burton think he is? [. . .] Barging in here like that? [. . .] And that big-headed so-called head master, Toppin. Who he thinks he's to come into my yard this evening, to bring a million people in my sanctuary, and then, in front of the world, to embarrass me—" She fiercely slapped her breast with an open palm as she addressed herself—"me, a God-fearing woman who never

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108 See: Foster (1991), op. cit., pp. 218-221.

109 Boyce Davies (1994), op. cit., p. 153.

110 See: Foster (1991), op. cit., p. 218.

111 Foster (1991), op. cit., pp. 215-216.

> called either of them a fool, not once? How can he do something like that to me?[112]

Miss Howell articulates that her house is her sanctuary, and it is within this space that she may exert power. She has power to rule or to change life within its limitations. She is then told that she had defended those very men before, to which she adds: 'But you can't expect two big grown men to come into the yard of a poor woman like me and pick on her grandson, can you? [. . .] Not even if they're politicians, you can't expect something like this'.[113]

Though Miss Howell's only possible public and immediate response to the men is submission and polite acknowledgement, the implication is that they are wrong in the community's eyes. They have broken a code of behaviour. This, one could argue, is perhaps an unwritten, unspoken rule among those in this community, as Anson stated about the 'fowl':[114] one is never to disrespect anyone, particularly a woman or an older woman, defenceless or otherwise, and most certainly not in her own home. To go against such a rule, even if unwritten, would signify 'poor-brought-upsy', a characteristic frowned upon in the region. Thus, the penultimate line can be read, after the attack, as 'Now, I am calling them fools' a heavy criticism for men who 'should know better'. This protected space is also evidenced in Foster's *Sleep on, Beloved*, but it is not used to the extent that the author wields it in the first novel. However, it is a regenerative space.

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112 Ibid. p. 219.

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid., p. 229-234.

Problems with Marginality and Breaking the Cycle

The grandmother's home in Jamaica allows for a re-connection, as bell hooks argues, with the past and therefore with the essence that has escaped these women living in Toronto. The narrator offers:

> The women in her family were destined to relive their mothers' lives. Just as Grandma Nedd had ended up the same way as her mother, so had Ona ended up like Grandma Nedd. And Suzanne like Ona? It seemed to be an unbreakable cycle of pain and suffering unless fate intervened, or God forgave the youngest female of the family for the sins of the preceding generations.[115]

Foster continues in the same vein as he offers Grandma Nedd's exact words in the situation as she saw it in her family. 'It's only the cold hand of death that can end this curse, [. . .]For as long as we have a girl child in this family, the curse is bound to continue'.[116] This is the curse of unwanted illegitimate pregnancy as it is with Toycie. It could also simply be the curse of being a woman. This curse follows these women. As in Ona's case, what her mother offers comes to pass, by her going to Kingston to dance. But the female link does not break because of an unwanted pregnancy. The safe space of female-centred home, from whence Ona was sent forth will serve as the base for another generation. Mira Nedd tells her daughter:

> I keep telling you there are certain things in this life that we Nedd women like we can never avoid. [. . .] the same way we bring about our own destruction by letting these married men have their own way. But what can I do? All I can do is accept you back. 'Cause you're my only child. But at the same time, I still got to make sure that you understand what you're dealing with, so you won't have the wool pulled over your eyes another time. 'Cause, to tell the truth, you ain't ready yet. Not at all. [. . .] I only got to look at the way your stomach developing to know you carrying a girl [. . .] Which only proves my point about this curse thing. It can be passed on only through a daughter.[117]

These observations are reminiscent of Naipaul's Laura. It is perhaps a part of the irony that the women see the need to deconstruct the so called 'curse'. This is contrary to the assumptions by those onlookers outside who cannot understand why

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115 Foster (1995), op. cit., p. 21.

116 Ibid.

117 Foster (1995), op. cit., pp. 63-64

an unwed-mother would be upset if her daughter were to follow the same pattern. These women, similar to Laura and Mira Nedd, are, however, deeply desirous that their daughters and granddaughters do better than they could have done. Although Mira Nedd is not angry with her daughter, Foster conveys the desire for improvement; moving beyond the known to the realm of possibility and, consequently, respectability.[118] Although escape from that space is necessary to break the 'curse', the return is also essential to re-identify one's self in a myriad of characters that are disconnected from any single truth.

Exile as a Factor in Reconstructing Lives

This process is both facilitated and hindered through emigration, separating her from her daughter. But Ona is able to reconstruct female-centred family space with fictive kin.[119] The author uses Mrs. King, an older woman in Toronto, whom Ona employs to help her with the children, as a voice to articulate the problems as society falls apart with no elders to bring up the children with a sense of the past. This woman thus becomes a stand-in grandparent for these children, who, like Mira Nedd in Jamaica, tries to help Ona and Suzanne make something of themselves in Canada. Foster articulates in a multivocalic sense the need to leave but also to stay, and the problems that arise when one party leaves and re-locates her life and family to the metropolis, as well as the problems that exist if the mother remains with her family in the island.[120]

> I does really feel sorry for West Indian children like Telson here who ain't got no grandmother or grandfather, no aunty or uncle. That ain't the way we does bring up children in the West Indies, where everybody does live like one big family. The poor children up here don't even know who they is or where their family come from, no sense of belonging. [. . .] How will they ever learn times and seasons to life with no grandmother or grandfather? African people always left these teachings to the grandparents, but in this society, there are no teachers.[121]

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118 See: Besson (1993).

119 See: Terbog Penn (1995).

120 This is a significant trope in exile communities. This would replace the other mother and kin network Patricia Hill Collins (1990), Terbog Penn (1995), discuss.

121 Foster (1995), op. cit., p. 50; See also: Trinh Minh-ha (1989).

Mrs. King articulates the importance of elders in the community. She realises that grandmothers are the teachers for the future generation. They are the ones who pass on the language and the traditions. She also illustrates the link to the African past and its continuation in the new world, and argues that exile frustrates the need for this tradition to continue. Marshall's observations about the importance of the poets in the kitchen falls in line with Mrs. King's beliefs.[122] It is then no wonder that Suzanne is left with her grandmother in Jamaica. Ona soon leaves for a domestic position in Canada,[123] as the woman in the interviewing office says: 'we looking for the chance to work hard so we can send back home a little something to put rice in the children mouths'.[124] There is little opportunity for women at home so they venture farther afield in the hope of creating themselves anew, as Mira Nedd argues. There is, however, the issue of denying motherhood in order to be given a job on the domestic scheme in the first place, as it is solely for childless women. By so doing, the woman is given an opportunity to change her life. However, Ona falls into the trap of unwanted pregnancy time and again, until eventually she ends up institutionalised in a mental asylum. She also feels exiled from her home community.[125] Significantly, the child born in Canada suffers initially due to the lack of female kinship networks, but, by the end of the novel, the reader assumes that new bonds have been forged within the exile community.

Foster, after providing Suzanne with a stable home, allows her to become side tracked when she gets to Canada. There is, first, the animosity that she feels toward her mother, whom she feels has abandoned her in Jamaica with Grandma Nedd. Simultaneously, however, there is the desire to stay with Grandma Nedd, who by this time has become her mother, educating her in the ways of life, religion, and healing practices, even if she does so unconsciously.

Moreover, Foster could be utilising alienation in this case as a technique to explode the dream of milk and honey in the metropolis. Ona's expectations make the experience impossibly traumatic for her, and, once on the downward spiral, she

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122 See: Marshall (1983).

123 This is a common theme in West Indian literature. See: Senior (1991).

124 Foster (1995), op. cit., p. 71.

125 Foster (1995), op. cit., chapter 23, pp. 290-297.

cannot recover her balance.[126] Even in Canada, reality is harsh for these women. Suzanne does, however, attempt to salvage her and her brother's lives. The alienation is also seen in Pollard's short story, 'My Mother'. Here, the daughter, like Suzanne, Howard, his brothers and Panty, has spent her life with her grandmother, a surrogate mother. She cannot, therefore, immediately accept another woman, even if she is her natural mother, into the space occupied by her grandmother/mother. Pollard's narrator expresses her alienation and ambiguous feelings for her mother when she offers:

> I had never known my mother. I had known her money and her barrels and my grandmother's respect for her. I had not wept at her funeral. But that morning, in the subway station at Fourteenth Street, in the middle of nowhere, in the midst of a certain timelessness, I wept for her, unashamedly,[127]

It is not until the daughter situates herself in her mother's reality that she can know anything about her or feel anything for her or understand her mother at all. The grandmother brought the child up to be grateful to her mother for slaving away in New York to send money back monthly so that she could survive; the continually articulated remittance that so many families rely on in the Caribbean. Her grandmother becomes her mother. But the mother must return. And when she does return, she is viewed with suspicion. The daughter narrates the story telling the reader:

> Every year we expected my mother home on vacation, and every year she wrote that she was sorry that she couldn't make it. But she always sent, as if to represent her, a large round box that people insisted on calling a barrel. It was full of used clothes of all sorts, obviously chosen with little regard for my size or my grandmother's size [. . .] Every year we expected my mother home on vacation. But she never came. The year I was in third form they flew her body home. I hadn't heard that she was ill. I felt for months afterward that my very last letter should have said something different, something more; should have shown more gratitude than the others. But I could not have possibly known that would be the last.[128]

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126 Foster also uses the space to enunciate the vulnerability of these women who sell their souls to leave their country in order to put a little food in the mouths of the ones they leave behind. See: O'Callaghan (1990); See also: Boyce Davies (1990). op. cit., p. 127-138.

127 Pollard, p. 152.

128 Pollard, p. 150.

This account by the narrator of losing her mother is only facilitated by the existence of the grandmother who has insistently kept the mother alive for the daughter. The daughter only knows her mother, aside from her grandmother's (conjuring) recounting, through the packages and remittances she sent to them in their island home. She, therefore, only knows a construct of her mother that is no longer fact, but legacy/her-story. Articulated then is the problematic situation of travel or journey to 'foreign' for a better future and the inability for return. At the core of Foster's novel, however, is the need to return. Suzanne subverts the forces that control her and attempt to erase her by **journeying** back to her grandmother's bedside before she dies.[129] This journey effects a reconciliation that, is hoped, will prevent the continuation of the curse by more fully comprehending life. The grandmother in Pollard's story, like Mira Nedd, tells her granddaughter that she must be grateful to her mother for the sacrifices she has made for her. Unlike Pollard's story, where there is never a real re-connection between mother and daughter, Suzanne manages a return while Mira Nedd is still alive. Ona also returns to bury her mother. It is this return that causes some form of revelation, that liberates her (in)sanity so that she re-connects with the religious part of her life and from then on preaches around Toronto until she is institutionalised. For Ona, the return comes too late. By the time she goes to Jamaica, to her female-centred space, she can only reconnect with pieces of a past that are not enough to save her in her foreign home. She has become too emotionally detached from what is real and what is fiction. Upon her return to Toronto, her infirmity will resurface, forcing her to be institutionalised. For Suzanne, on the other hand, the return is timely. She is allowed to heal herself, her relationship with her past, with her grandmother, which in turn gives her the opportunity to see where she has wronged in her relationship with Ona. By returning, she has gained the strength to renegotiate her position as regards her past, and thus plot a new course to her life.

Problems With Articulation and *Rebeldía*

Although the connection between these women appears tenuous at best and strained, it is a connection that must be teased out. The inter-textual link that comes from accounts of cultural resistance that springing to the surface from a submerged site is

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129 See: Foster (1995), op. cit., particularly chapter 23, pp. 290-297, for details on Journeying; See also: Boyce Davies (1994), op. cit., pp. 130-151, where she explores journeying and fixity. See also: Senior (1992); Murphy (1994).

dormant only until a willing eye reads it, a willing ear hears it, a willing hand pens it, and a willing soul perpetuates it so that the reader has access to it and silence is broken. That is the most important; that silence be broken and a voice, a voice of protest and personhood speak forth. Ona's last activities can then be read as an assertion of her self and rebellion against a hostile society. She re-connects with the Afro-centred religion that allows women more autonomy and provides a position from whence they may be heard, and, by so doing, re-aligns herself with her mother and the other women in her community back home. Perhaps if she had re-connected with the church sooner, she may have survived in the cold reality of 'foreign' and being able to express herself would have allowed her to throw off the burdens that she carried with her. Ona then does throw off the burden of oppression and silence when she spreads the word of the Lord as her female kin has taught her. However, Suzanne has established more of a connection with her grandmother and seemingly has learned the ways to survive within the society's parameters of normal better than Ona. She, like Gloria Anzaldúa, is able to voice her self-doubt and is thus liberated:

> Esos movimientos de rebeldía que tenemos en la sangre nosotros los mexicanos surgen como ríos desbocanados en mis venas. Y como mi raza que cada en cuando deja caer esa esclvitud de obedecer, de callarse y aceptar, en mi está la rebeldía encimita de mi carne. Debajo de mi humillada mirada está una cara insolente lista para explotar. Me costó muy caro mi rebeldía—acalambrada con desvelos y dudas, sintiendome inútil, estúpida, e impotente.[130]

Anzaldúa argues that rebellion is not easy or inexpensive. But perhaps rebellion is better than feeling impotent to change one's surroundings. Once again, the importance of 'space/place' resurfaces as it is within this protective space that articulations of resistance, of empowerment, of respect, of bonding, and of strength are enunciated. The coding or seeming silence, which the grandmother encrypts, is only decoded by those on the inside and is not really silence at all, but another survival strategy. This is a part of her rebellion. The signifying that goes on is loaded with resistance to a hostile border zone that surrounds the yard. Aggressive rebellion is however difficult when one does not have the brute force to back it up. This lack of force is so for Miss Howells.

The crux of the argument is Davies's 'female-centered household' which is the space Miss Howell defends. The politicians' attack on Miss Howell is significant as this space is what she terms 'her sanctuary'. Had the attack been on the road, it would not have been such a personal affront, such an invasion of personal space, as

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130 Anzaldúa (1987), op. cit. p. 15.

in the road these men are the authority, though the community might still question their integrity. This space is important to Miss Howell for, as a poor black woman, she has no other space. It is within this yard, this domestic sphere, that she is head. Understanding and comfort are also woven into the fabric of this space.

In Beka's house the space that she shares with Granny Ivy is similar. Their physical location is not, however, limited to their room in the attic of the Lamb house. They are in a safe female-centred space even when they hold discussions late at night on the front verandah. Virginia Woolf's premise that all a woman needs is a room of her own and the key to the door is explored as she articulates a reality that misses many Caribbean women for, although they may be the heads of their households, their space is always occupied.[131] And, as evidenced with Panty and GB, there is always a struggle for the ownership of that space that the grandmother often surrenders or simply acquiescently leaves to the grandson. Most often though, the grandson leaves the homeplace or space to move into a broader world and it is the granddaughter who will remain to carry on the legacy of the grandmother.[132] Gaston Bachelard refers to this space as 'eulogized space' which is:

> Space that has been seized upon by the imagination [and] cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination. Particularly, it nearly always exercises an attraction. For it concentrates being within limits that protect.[133]

The key is protection. Even if the space is limited, it is nonetheless protective. In this situation, however, it goes beyond an imagined space or the realm of images, as Bachelard and Baker argue, to a physical manifestation of safe female space, where change can happen, where **'talk'** can happen.[134] But even in the event of **'talking'**, it can be argued that there is a profound silence. These writers have illustrated the handing down of resistance tools, which may occur within this protective space. Edgell, Bennett and Foster have, from varying perspectives, argued against that silence. The narrator, by telling the story, refutes the idea of silence. The writer, by

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131 Virginia Woolf (1929).

132 See: Momsen (1991); Bush (1990); Schwarz-Bart (1972, 1982); Zobel (1950); and Boyce Davies (1994).

133 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*. trans. by Maria Jolas. (Boston, Beacon Press, 1969, p. xxii.) cited also in Baker (1991), p. 72.

134 This will also be important upon examination of the French Caribbean texts.

writing the grandmother's story also disrupts the idea of a silenced subaltern. There is no longer a seamless super-narrative or gaps in the discourse where their voices should be. They have thus fallen in line with bell hooks's observations that one must insist on being heard. Boyce Davies also agrees that silence is impossible. She points out that:

> The statement ***"it's not everything that you can talk,"*** locates the ways in which speech for the dispossessed is received, for it also identifies its opposite: it's not everything people will hear. The ways in which certain forms of speech are erased, the way in which the "rational discourse" of the dominant culture (as in a senate speech or parliamentary language) reverses itself, expropriates certain forms of speech, discredits critical speech for political necessity. ***"It's not everything you can talk"*** is the pretext of Spivak's assertion on the impossibility of the subaltern woman's speech to be fully articulated or represented given all the already embedded constructions and "spoken fors."[135]

As Opal Palmer Adisa discuses in *Bake Face and Other Guava Stories*, the women in her life have never been silent.[136] She states that their ability to use language was something that she marvelled at. So, it is no wonder that Boyce Davies's theory that she has developed from childhood exposure should articulate the insistence that even within the supposed silence there is an even louder discourse that continues to assert itself. GB's language may be discredited but it is the insistence on speaking in spite of it that disallows silence. As Boyce Davies theorises:

> Yet the full version, ***"It's not everything you can talk, . . ."*** with the ellipsis, challenges that very construction of non-speech. Instead it recognizes safe spaces where black woman's speech can be heard. A certain kind of opposition and reopening is represented in the conjunction "but" and the elliptical space that signals the speech outside of the closure suggested by ***"It's not everything you can talk."***[137]

These arguments, conflated with *Anzaldúa's 'movimientos de rebeldía [que] surgen como rios desbocanados'*, illustrate that silence is not a reality.[138] The outside

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[135] Boyce Davies (1994), op. cit., p. 152.

[136] Opal Palmer Adisa *Bake Face and Other Guava Stories* (Berkeley, Kelsey St. Press, 1986), p. xii.

[137] Boyce Davies (1994), op. cit., pp. 152-153.

[138] Anzaldúa (187), op. cit., p. 15

has been turned in or the inside has been turned out. The control levied on **'talk'** has been subverted by writing/telling stories that bring women out of the shadowy recesses of the past, freeing them from within the grandmother's clearly demarcated, delimited space. These women, GB, Miss Howells, Granny Ivy, are similar in that they allow, and to some extent encourage, boundary and limitation transgression in their households.

Religion and Good Deeds: A Façade for Exploitation

GB uses her homespace to construct a safe space for alternative religious expression. While she continues to attend Parson Allen's church, she also leads her own church. Ironically, again, the church, the very establishment that women turn to for solace and strength in their lives, is the ultimate traitor of their faith.[139] Where else could GB have progressed to such an extent? GB's treason is not, however, obvious, and is therefore that much more dangerous. The people who occupy the church space are worse than GB. They re-inscribe the church with anti-black weapons, which forbid real progress on the part of the colonial subject. But the congregation still give their lives to the church and the perpetuation of Christian living. If this seems a little flawed on the part of the subject, s/he has learned or mimicked well. But the church cuts the deepest as its deceit, denial of space to the subjected woman, and the sexual exploitation of many women is so complete. James points out that:

> There is no opposition of good and evil. The 'good' Christians are as unloving and hypocritical in their own ways as GB, although they may be more self-deceived. Parson Allen and his wife dominate the gallery of English do-gooders that batten spirituality on the hunger of the Jamaican poor. At first there is some sympathy for Allen. . . But even his virtue is undermined. He is a fool , and his acts of charity are ways of gaining prestige from his parishioners and for his own self-esteem. His anti-racialism is only a front for the worst forms of racial prejudice.[140]

The writers illustrate the extreme bigotry that underlies the seemingly Christian, all-loving, all-caring, benign façade that the Allens present. Mr. Allen pointedly condemns mixed marriages and Bennett, scathingly, criticises his stance. 'I

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139 See: Bennett (1964), op. cit., pp. 74-77. For an example of the church exploiting women. See also: *The Tribune* Friday 27 August 1999, 'Pastor charged with sexual assault'.

140 James op. cit., p. iv.

know that you, like myself, feel that mixed marriage is of the devil's creation'.[141] Bennett sets Mr. Allen up in his discourse to dismantle racism or pretend racial harmony and liking for those in his parish, as he ultimately reveals his bigoted manner. 'God could have made his son Jesus a half-caste, half-white, half-black, in order to demonstrate to the whole world for all time that race difference is unimportant to heaven'.[142] Mr. Allen's point is that God did not do that. Mrs Allen agrees with Mr. Allen's speech about Panty. 'Were it not for his colour, I would not have the slightest objection to being his father-in-law'.[143] She argues that: 'I'd prefer my daughter dead than married to a coloured man. I would never be grandmother to a half-caste. I am loyal to my race, even if being so is a crime. God made me thus'.[144] Mrs Allen, here uses God as the reason to support her class of racism. She sees, as does her husband, the blacks needing to be kept separate from the whites, otherwise pandemonium would result. While the Allens comment on their prejudices in private, Mr. Allen's brand of racism flows over into his job, arguably without his even realising that he is being bigoted. He tells Panty:

> I am only one of the millions of open-minded Englishmen who do not believe in the nonsense called race-prejudice. I personally like your people and, as a clergyman, regard them all as God's children. [. . .] Race-difference was ordained by our living Father in Heaven and it is presumpt[u]ous of some to want to alter the divine plan and law.[145]

Divine law shall not be changed, not even to give a girl who finds herself pregnant, by accident, a second chance. Zee Edgell explores a similar situation with Toycie's pregnancy. She is expelled from her convent school because, as Sister Virgil puts it, 'Toycie is one of our best students. [. . .] I have the parents of the other students to consider. They would be shocked if I allowed Toycie to return to school after bearing a child'.[146] And if Parson Allen's beliefs are an indication of how other parents feel who send their daughters to convent schools then it is not surprising that

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141 Bennett op. cit., p. 210.

142 Ibid., p. 209.

143 Ibid., p. 212.

144 Ibid., p. 212-213.

145 Bennett op. cit., p. 208-209.

146 Edgell (1982), op. cit., p. 119.

Sister Virgil should feel so strongly about keeping Toycie out of school. However, Bill Lamb's counter-argument to Sister Virgil is:

> Shocked, Sister, shocked? [. . .] Why should anybody be shocked? Toycie is an excellent student. She alone is not to be blamed for his accident, and Mr. Villanueva's son will not be expelled from school. This is the last year before she graduates. She could leave school now and come back after the baby is born. I personally would see to it that all this would not become a scandal.[147]

But Bill Lamb's protestations fall on deaf ears. This argument between Mr. Lamb and Sister Virgil is representative, once again, of the church's failure to support women in its community. Ironically, the father of the child is beyond reproach: it is only the girl who is demonised. This is also ironic as it shows the exploitative relationship Lorna Down discusses and how entrenched it is within the society's moral fibre.[148] In spite of Toycie being one of the best students, she will be condemned to a life of marginality because of lack of education. Bennett presents the theme in different light. One reason the Church tries to counter unplanned pregnancy is described as:

> Mr Allen had the usual clergyman's outward abomination for evil and vice, but in a special way he hated the ugly social problem of illegitimacy in Jamaica, fearing that the indiscriminate production of coloured children was a threat to white hegemony and might eventually result in complicating God's segregated plans for mankind.[149]

Bennett scathingly condemns Allen's supposed benevolence, illustrating what is at the foundation of the character's goals. He uses irony and satire to cut deeply into the façade of caring, love, and acceptance. In Toycie's case, the Lamb family also illustrates the un-giving nature of the church. But the family does not give up. They rally around Toycie in an attempt at support. Ironically, it is Bill Lamb, one of the more conservative members of the family who comes out so strongly in Toycie's favour. Perhaps Bill Lamb's needed intervention is due to the extremely gendered patriarchal outer world where Sister Virgil sees women as emotional beings who must learn to maintain their calm if they are to achieve any level of success. Therefore,

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147 Ibid.

148 See: Lorna Down, 'Singing Her Own Song: Women and Selfhood in Zee Edgell's *"Beka Lamb"' Ariel* 18 , no. 4 (October 1987): 39-50.

149 Bennett op. cit., p. 121.

arguably, she would have dismissed the other women without second thought and particularly in the case of Miss Eila whose language, as Palmer Adisa points out, would be seen as not being language, and therefore that much more easily discounted. Religion is also used against Toycie as Emilio is a good Catholic boy 'who nevertheless refuses to marry her because it would interfere with his studies and upset his mother'.[150] However, Foster's novel demonstrates that in Miss Howell's case, she does not give up even though the obstacles mount up against her. Because of Pretty's baby, she is sent away from taking part fully in the church because she must 'set things right in [her] own house'.[151] This is referred to as reading out.[152] There is a great deal of power in the reading out of a person.[153] The church uses it as a punishment and it is meant to be a manner of exile from the rest of the community. Miss Howells is, however, individual enough, strong enough, and determined enough to survive even though she has been exiled from the church community. She adds:

> Well, I had to tell him that even Christ has his cross to bear, and that I was willing to bear mine too without his adding to them. Christ overcame his troubles and me and my children will overcome ours too, I tell him. So I walked out and left him sitting there in the front of his church.[154]

Perhaps Foster uses the last two words of the grandmother's statement purposely as a further criticism of the society. "His church" is significant as it extends patriarchal society and beliefs into the church, stressing that, even within the security of the church, the woman is more vulnerable than the man. This theme would be stressed by the problematic nature of Toycie's case. The notion of accepting the fallen, scarlet woman back into the fold is absent from this preacher's mind.

In spite of this double standard, the women of Lodge Road, like their slave predecessors, depend on religion to get them through. Society does little or nothing

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150 Skinner (1998), op. cit., p. 184-185.

151 Foster (1991), op. cit., p. 145.

152 Being read-out is an extremely strong disciplinary action usually taken when women have illegitimate children, even when they may be fathered by the priest himself. See also: Bennett 's criticism of Parson Pendance. The Catholic Church deals with unwed pregnancy differently.

153 Men are not often read-out. They are rarely if ever read-out for fathering an illegitimate child.

154 Foster (1991), op. cit., p. 145.

to help them, often inhibiting their progress. They must ultimately look to God for that help. Although the help may be nebulous, it is faith that keeps them going.

Ultimately then, these women only have their space to rely on. It is not surprising, therefore, that these spaces take on mythic proportions in these works. While Miss Howells feels protected behind her zinc piling fence, GB feels safe, until Panty intercedes, in Kate's house in Kingston, but must return to Swine Lane where she dies. Granny Ivy and Beka feel safe in their attic room and on the veranda of the Lamb house. Suzanne and Ona must return to the small protective space of Myra Nedd's shack in Jamaica where they try to reconnect with themselves and their essence.

Grandmother's Importance Reconsidered

The writers in this chapter illustrate the importance of the grandmother in maintaining the family, striving to survive even if this also means using silence as a strategy for self-preservation. The grandmother is the only person the third generation can rely on. She becomes a mythic character who is also real enough to inflict punishment. This archetypal grandmother is read-out of the church but continues to read her Bible or have her Bible read to her in the safety of her home space.[155] This grandmother, like Granny Ivy, challenges the existing power structure in order to make room for women in the future. She refuses to let pregnancy break her female offspring down. No more will the 'brown skin gial' from the Calypso have to stay home and mind the baby, losing out on life while the man continues his exploits. In all of her novels, Zee Edgell has written a liberating end. She has allowed the characters to move on with their lives in spite of unplanned pregnancies, and single-motherhood. Pavana becomes an important and respected member of the community in spite of her illegitimate pregnancy and single-motherhood. Arguably, Pavana's activism could be a direct result of the problems she experienced in her life. She confronts the myth head on by moving back to Belize instead of remaining the rest of her life in exile. In *The Festival of San Joaquin*, Edgell liberates her character, Luz Marina, so that she can now speak out about abuse. She is not forced to die in prison because she kills an abusive common-law-husband in self-defence. Finally with the help of her mother she is able to begin putting her life back together. Although her husband's family are against her and try their best to continue to silence her and the others in the community who try to speak out against them, they continue to tell their stories.

There is always an effort to silence those seen as inferior and continue to perpetuate a power imbalance. However, it is through the continual striving as witnessed in *Beka Lamb* to overcome this hurdle that people survive. Granny Ivy pushes Beka to do her best. Luz Marina's mother gives her all the support she can to assist in re-empowering her and her community. It is, therefore, not only the insistence on survival in Luz Marina's case, but also her example of speaking out on behalf of the community. She is the one, even if questionably invisible and under threat of death by her in-laws, who speaks against them. She uses the power gained in her female centred space to promote healing in the community as a whole. Arguably, then, it is an effort at making the patriarchal outer sphere less hostile to women. It is also important to note, particularly in Bennett's work, that it is

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155 Ibid., pp. 25-26.

precisely because of the exploitation and marginalisation of the colonial world that GB must subvert laws and reinvent them so that she can achieve some form of autonomy.

As writers therefore, Foster, Edgell, and Bennett use their experience to attempt to deconstruct a monolithic discourse built around them as West Indians. The domineering matriarch as discussed in Chapter One, the construct of a Western imagination which seeks to separate and promote black female alterity is one of the images they work to dismantle. They articulate another side to their stories where their grandmothers and 'Othermothers' may demonstrate traces of these characteristics which mark them as Other, as matriarchs within a hostile outer world and as scarlet women because many of them may not have husbands; but the writers point out that there is more than one truth.

The fact that many West Indian households are headed by older women who work to keep the family together comes through clearly. All three writers incorporate aspects of history that are at variance with their lived reality. They work at creating narratives that disallow the same marginalisation, through lack of understanding, from continuing. Although writing from different backgrounds, their novels come together to illustrate how they manipulate the myth of inferiority to build a counter image. These writers strategically insert their lived experiences and theories of Caribbeanness into their narratives to highlight an alternative reality to that represented by Western discourse.

Chapter Three:
Lo que bien se quiso nunca se olvida: The Hispanic Caribbean

De mi tierra bella, de mi tierra santa,
Oigo ese grito de los tambores,
Y los timbales al cumbanchar.
Y ese pregón que canta un hermano,
Que de su tierra vive lejano,
Y que el recuerdo le hace llorar,
Una canción que vive entonando,
De su dolor de su proprio llanto,
Y se le escuchar penar.

La tierra te duele, la tierra te da
En medio del alma, cuando tú no estás.
La tierra te empuja de raíz y cal
La tierra suspira si no te ve más.
(pregón) La tierra donde naciste no
la puedes olvidar,
Porque tiene tus raíces y lo que dejas atrás[1]

Lo que dejas atrás refers to the grandmother and a way of life, that, in spite of everything, cannot be lost. Grandmother will see to it. She holds a great part of *sus raíces transcendentes* in her soul. The sea that surrounds the island and washes the shores of all the land near by, that bridges the space between Cuba and exile, that carries the words of Gloria Estefan's song across from Cuba to the US and back again allows for the ebb and flow of the rhythms that connect the diaspora to their homeland, their grandmothers. In *La casa de la laguna,* Puerto Rican writer Rosario Ferré says: *El agua siempre es amor, porque hace posible la comunicación.*[2] The grandmother is *la dueña del tiempo,* even if she is still in Havana. As Celia Cruz puts it: *'De la Habana hasta aquí hay una corriente que a mí me llama'.*[3] These are different words that relate to the same sentiment of homeland and connection, memory and the past, the idea of similarity yet fragmentation, plurality.[4] This observation hangs hauntingly, suspended over the seas that carry Celia Cruz's *corriente* as the rhythms move from English to Spanish.

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[1] Gloria Estefan 'Mi Tierra' *Mi Tierra* 1993 Sony Music Entertainment. New York.

[2] Rosario Ferré, *La casa de la laguna* (New York, Vintage Español, 1996). p. 402.

[3] Celia Cruz 'De La Habana Hasta Aquí.' *Azucar Negra* 1993 RMM Records and Video, Sony Discos, Miami.

[4] Celia Cruz and Gloria Estefan, like many other singers and musicians are seen as the heart and soul of Cuba in exile and the dream of the old world. Their music embodies Cubanness even though they no longer live there. Politics in the Cuban exile community are extremely volatile and, as such, 'dangerous' for any person in or on the outskirts of the culture. Gloria Estefan herself was attacked in October 1997 by the exile community for defending the right to freedom of expression of those Cuban artists still living on the island. With the death, in late 1997, of José Mas Canosa, right wing conservative leader of the 'Miami Cubans', the future of the exile community is somewhat less certain. However, his son seems to be more hard-line than was the father. See: Cecilia Rodríguez-Milanés' 'Negrita', in *Little Havana Blues: A Cuban American Literature Anthology* ed. by Virgil Suárez and Dalia Poey, (Houston, Arte Público Press, 1996), pp. 407-419; See also: Robert M. Levine and Moisés Asís eds., *Cuban Miami* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 2000).

The Caribbean has a rhythm that does not obey boundaries. That rhythm moves across seas and oceans, *mares y fronteras,* borders and continents. Home then, a sense of Caribbeanness, moves with the rhythm to wherever its children of the diaspora wander and connects them to their homeland. These moving rhythms may be heard in the fiction created by the Caribbean community in exile as well as in the homeland. In this chapter the particular rhythm of Cubanness that flows across the gulf into Florida and up into New York, wherever there is *un hijo o una hija de Chango o de la Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre* will be examined. The grandmother embodies this rhythm of Cubanness that transcends the geographical borders and through her relationship with her diasporic offspring re-inscribes them with that Cubanness, as she is the agent of change and tradition, a metaphor for home, and an archetypal presence in their imagination. She is the one they will always remember for the love that they bore her. Her spirit knows no bounds. *Un dicho criollo*[5] states *'lo que bien se quiso nunca se olvida'*. The connection to the grandmother and the homeland is one of those things *lo que bien se quiso y nunca se olvida*. In Cristina García and Pablo Medina's texts, the grandmother becomes *la dueña del pasado*, holding the keys to the diaspora's past. This chapter will therefore examine *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Marks of Birth* for their textual constructions of home and the grandmother who provides for her grandchildren's spiritual awakening while grounding them in a sense of self and insisting on the importance of traditions and change.

5 *Criollo*/Creole is used in the Cuban, Puerto Rican and Dominican sense here, which means something that is born in the island, a very simplified definition.

El Exilio y el Sueño of homeland and Continuity: *Historia y Contexto*

The two songs, *'Mi Tierra'* and *'De la Habana Hasta Aquí'*, by Gloria Estefan and Celia Cruz respectively, relate to this longing for the past and also a profound rooting in that past. Gloria Estefan and Celia Cruz are both significant figures in the Miami Cuban community and in the Cuban-American community as a whole. They both articulate the dream of going back and creating a link to the past homeland, but their experiences are different. Celia Cruz was born and grew up in Cuba. She began singing at the Tropicana in Havana. When she left she was already well known as *la reina de la salsa*. Gloria Estefan, on the other hand, was born in Cuba but was raised in exile. Her memories of her homeland come from a very limited experience with it and are constructed on what she has been told and has seen through her life in Miami. Their songs are juxtaposed here to illustrate their shared longing for the past, even when only remembered in a filtered way. The emotions evoked by the songs also demonstrate the continuity of the debate over desire to return to a free Cuba and the likelihood of that return. Cruz's song dates back many years in its original version or recording while ironically Estefan's song is much more recent; it was recorded in 1993. Gloria Estefan began as a pop rock singer in a Spanish/English band and moved more toward English with the band Miami Sound Machine. With the album, *Mi Tierra*, she has moved away from her soft main stream rock to a more romantic, traditional style of Cuban music, where she sings in Spanish.

In the late 1970's and early 1980's, smaller publishing presses in the United States were beginning to publish Latino(a) writers:[6] Oscar Hijuelos, Cristina García, Pablo Medina, Virgil Suárez and Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, to name just a few. They are all writers who belong to a generation born in Cuba but raised in America, referred to as the one and a half generation.[7] Their works explore the connection to homeland and growing up in America using English in a highly political exile community. Their novels are mostly written in English with some Spanish words and phrases incorporated into the main text.[8]

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6 Arte Público Press is one of the smaller presses publishing Latino(a) writers in the US.

7 See: María Crsitina García, *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996); Cristina García, Born in Cuba in 1958; Pablo Medina,born in Cuba in 1948; Virgil Suárez, born in Cuba in 1962; Gustavo Pérez Firmat, born in Cuba in 1949 This is a name given to the group, and to any individuals who fit this description, by themselves and the critics and the Cuban community in exile which distinguishes between those born and raised in Cuba, those born in Cuba but raised in the US, and those born and raised in the US of Cuban parents.

8 For example, in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*. *'Ay,mi cielo*, what do all the years and separation mean except a more significant betrayal' (240)?

Cristina García's 1992 novel, *Dreaming in Cuban*,[9] differs somewhat from the other older writers as she bases most of her story in Cuba and allows for movement back and forth.[10] She recounts the story of three generations of women in the del Pino family, beginning with the grandmother Celia del Pino, moving through the daughters Lourdes and Felicia and the son Javier and ending up with the granddaughter Pilar, the first grandchild, Luz and Milagro and Ivanito, Felicia's three children, and Irinita, Javier's daughter. Lourdes, her husband Rufino Puente, the son of a rich powerful pre-revolution Cuban family (which gives some clue as to his allegiances and history,) and Pilar leave Cuba after the 1959 Cuban Revolution. Celia describes Rufino:

> Lourdes is seeing a young man I like very much. His name is Rufino Puente, and despite the fact that he comes from one of the wealthiest families in Havana, he's a modest young man. Lourdes says he shows up to classes in overalls and reeks of manure from his father's ranch. I'm pleased that he's not afraid to work, to get his hands dirty, unlike so many men from his circle.[11]

The novel progresses as Pilar discusses her life in New York and her mother's attempts to erase the past, when she was raped by a soldier after the revolution and lost the baby she was carrying at the time. Pilar, as a part of the one and a half generation, searches for an identity that she feels is anchored in her grandmother. Felicia, on the other hand, remains in Cuba and becomes a disciple of *Santería*. She marries and has three children before beginning love affairs with two other men. Javier leaves to study in Eastern Europe, but returns as an alcoholic whose wife has left him and taken their child. After her husband Jorge del Pino leaves Cuba to seek medical attention in America where his daughter is, leaving behind the revolution that he detests, Celia remains, a happy and productive part of the revolution. It has given her the chance to do more with her life than she was allowed in her youth.[12] This process is described as a second birth. Pilar and Lourdes return to Cuba, enabling Pilar, physically and spiritually, to reconnect with her grandmother and the

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9 Cristina García, *Dreaming in Cuban* (New York, Ballantine, 1992).

10 See: María Cristina García (1996), op. cit., p. 186.

11 García (1992), op. cit., p. 205.

12 See: Amelia Suárez Oquendo & Carmen N. Hernández Chávez 'La participación de la mujer en Cuba: balance y perspectivas', in *Caribbean Studies* Vol. 28. NO. 1 January-June 1995 (Rio Piedras, Instituto de Estudios del Caribe, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de Puerto Rico), pp. 147-162; Helen I. Safa, 'Reestructuración económica y subordinación de género', in *Caribbean Studies* op. cit., pp. 197-222.

country that she left as a young child. Return is not, however, a normal paradigm within such a rabidly anti-Castro community, particularly with someone as adamant as Lourdes.

In Pablo Medina's *The Marks of Birth*,[13] however, there is no return. The exile is permanent. The novel traces three generations of García-Turners, from Felicia, the grandmother, through her son Fernando to her grandson Antón. Felicia articulates the hopes that maybe the revolution will not be so bad. This thought is, however, dashed as people are picked up for questioning and often, imprisonment. Antón's father and uncle face these realities and this is when Felicia decides to take all her savings and send her family to the United States. Antón and his parents leave the island on a fishing boat for Key West and then move north to New York to begin a new life. Felicia remains in Cuba and life gets harder. Her brother, Antonio, is detained and eventually dies after spending his life in prison, which frees her to go into exile. She arrives in the United States and stays with her son in New York, but decides that she needs to live in Miami, more closely related to the island than New York, where the rest of her community has relocated itself.[14] Felicia begins to write the family history for her grandson after his birth so that he will know who he is. She continues to write the history while shaping her life in Miami, so that it is as closely related to her life on the island as possible. Felicia sees Antón as disenchanted and disillusioned with life and also trying to deny his island-self in order to privilege his American-self. When Felicia becomes ill, Antón is training with the exile army in the bush. He leaves to see his grandmother and after her death he takes her ashes back to his base, steals an airplane and flies her to the island where he scatters her ashes over the boulevard to fallen heroes. He is never seen or heard from again.

Significantly, Cuba had a very close connection with the United States from the late nineteenth century up to Fidel Castro's revolution of 1959.[15] Perhaps here, once again, the idea of interconnectedness is evident as Puerto Rico and Cuba were both players, or played on in the 1898 Treaty of Paris. Puerto Rico had been given limited self-government by Spain, only to learn that it had then become property of the United States. Obviously then, the two islands' realities were greatly connected

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13 Pablo Medina, *The Marks of Birth* (New York, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1994).

14 See: Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way* (Austin, Texas UP, 1994); Gustavo Pérez Firmat. 'Mirror, Mirror Mambo No, 5', in *Little Havana Blues* ed. by Virgil Suárez and Delia Poey, (Houston, Arte Público, 1996), pp. 398-199.

15 See: Hugh Thomas, *Cuba or The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York, Da Capo Press, 1998).

as they were, at first, both possessions of Spain and then they both became possessions of the US. As Rosario Ferré puts it,

> España había peleado con uñas y dientes por retener a Cuba, la joya más preciada de la Corona. Al finalizar la Guerra de los Siete Años, en 1763, España intercambió Cuba, que se encontraba entonces en manos de los ingleses, por la Florida. Un siglo después, miles de españoles murieron en Punta Brava, Dos Ríos y Camagüey, abatidos en combate sangriento por los rebeldes cubanos durante la revolución. Pero cuando España perdió a Cuba, dejó ir también a Puerto Rico. «¿Será una isla tan pobre que no vale la pena luchar por ella? [. . .] ¿O estaría Esapaña tan exhausta al final de la guerra hispanoamericana que no le fue posible seguir luchando?» [. . .] España nos concedió la autonomía seis meses antes de perder la guerra hispanoamericana, pero la ciudadanía puertorriqueña se malogró. Teníamos que viajar con pasaporte español, y lo perdimos al finalizar la guerra.[16]

Not expressly articulated is that Cuba then went to the United States as well as Puerto Rico, but with a façade of independence. The United States had a vested interest in a great part of the Cuban infrastructure, in particular the incredible economic wealth from sugar and other industries, such as the tobacco industry, on the island.[17] Thus, there was always a certain amount of movement from the island to the metropolis and back even before the revolutionary threat. This movement was also seen between the Dominican Republic and the United States as wealthier people went in and out of exile during various dictatorships or simply travelled for pleasure and/or to attend university. The relationship between the United States and Cuba is problematic as the patterns of influence have been interlinked though not always reciprocal. The relationship is also embedded in the running of the country, as the United States had a hand in Batista's dictatorship, during his second term in office, and gained a great deal through the prosperity of the gambling casinos in the island, as from the sugar cane. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, Celia argues pointedly:

> That Bastard Batista stole the country from us just when it seemed things could finally change. The US wants him in the palace. How else could he have pulled this off? I fear for my son, learning to be a man from such men.[18]

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16 Rosario Ferré(1996), op. cit., pp. 25-26.

17 See: Hugh Thomas (1998).

18 García (1992), op. cit., p. 163.

Her words help elucidate the complexities of the situation and also the horror and disappointment with which some of the country's population received Batista. The politics of this relationship may never be completely understood, particularly with regard to the Bay of Pigs invasion which the United States government funded and a great many Cuban exiles attempted in order to free the country from Castro's grip. The invasion was a disaster because military support was purportedly withdrawn once the Cuban-Americans had landed on the beach in Cuba. This situation has served only to further inflame already inflammable passions and hatreds. The military activity portrayed in *The Marks of Birth* is perhaps, in part, a response to the Bay of Pigs scenario. Medina plays on the continual training that goes on in the Everglades to attack and win back the island.[19] Since this failed attempt the ardent liberators of the island have trained and staged or attempted to stage many miniature attacks on the island. The Brothers to the Rescue is an exile group that continues to try to win back Cuba through many different strategies. Any time one goes into a Cuban-American café or Maximo Gómez park in Little Havana where the older men gather to discuss the plight of exile and the fight against Castro, one can hear of plans to attack the island. There is always the dream of return and the feeling of loss that never dies in exile.

The Miami Cuban community is an interesting phenomenon as it embodies a great many politically-charged contradictions. Politics in the exile community is a way of life and the normal hard-liners that wish to take Cuba back by force provide the backbone of the community. Little Havana, Calle Ocho, in Miami is perhaps more 'Cuban' than Havana. The men and women who inhabit this space and even those who locate themselves in Hialeah, Coral Gables and the other areas, claim to be or are seen as more fiercely Cuban than those in Cuba.[20] Time appears to have stopped for a great percentage of this population and they insist on living as if they were still able to return to the Havana they left behind. A great many aspects of culture long ago left behind in Cuba are fossilized in Miami. The community that has been constructed along Calle Ocho is an interesting mix of timelessness and a pre-revolutionary way of life. Cuban-American singers like Celia Cruz, Gloria Estefan, Jon Secada and Willie Chirino are demi gods there as long as they continue

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[19] One of these on going strategies, the spreading of anti-Castro propaganda flyers from planes over the island, led to the downing of three Brothers to the Rescue planes by the Cuban forces over Cuban waters in 1996. See also: Eduardo Manet, *Rhapsodie Cubaine* (Paris, Grasset, 1996).

[20] For discussions and more information on this see: Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way* (Austin, Texas UP, 1994); Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, *Next Year in Cuba: A Cubano's Coming of Age in America* (Anchor, New York, 1995); Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, in *Little Havana Blues* op. cit., pp. 392-400; An excellent work, though fictional is Eduardo Manet, *Rhapsodie Cubaine* (Paris, Grasset, 1996); Levine and Asís, *Cuban Miami*.

the hard-line anti-Castro discourse.[21] This Miami community is not an exclusive Cuban exile community in the United States, but it is the largest.[22] Little Havana has grown over the decades from the exodus that began in the late 1950s, even before 1959, to those who left in the 1980s by the Mariel Boat Lift and those who left more recently in the exodus seen in 1994-1995, during which the US government argued for 'no-tolerance' to any refugees and signed a pact with Fidel Castro, as well as the government of Haiti, that all Cubans, and Haitians—as well as Dominicans, would be returned to their respective island.[23] Those caught by the United States Coast Guard while trying to enter the United States were taken to various detention camps in Guantanamo Bay, or to Panama or other American naval bases. Many individuals, however, managed to get out of the refugee camps and make it to Miami, particularly if they had family members in the United States.[24] Ironically, it seems that many Cubans dream of getting to Miami, while those in Miami dream of getting back to Cuba: the old world.

Perhaps the title of Oscar Hijuelo's first novel *Our House in the Last World* best describes the sense of past and loss. It indicates a loss, implicit in the term 'the last world', that is very much a feeling that exists among many Cubans in exile. It also implies reconstruction through the use of 'our house'. Perhaps codified in this title is the closure with the past, except for that which went with the family into exile, the grandmother. In this chapter, the works examined are similar, possessing that sameness of the Caribbean rhythm that this thesis presents. However, García and Medina demonstrate a particular aspect of the grandmother that is less visible in other works by Cuban-American authors. Both writers narrate stories in which the grandmother is not alone with her grandchildren, as both parents are present. However, the relationship that the grandchildren have with their grandmother is symbolic of a deep connection and a lack of competition or resistance to authority; a

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21 See for example: Willie Chirino's *Cuba Libre* (Miami, Sony Discos Inc., 1998), which illustrates the Cuban-Americans' romantic notions of Cuba.

22 For some, less radical anti-communist exiles, it is perhaps easier to live outside the community and visit.

23 See: Cecilia Rodríguez Milanés' 'Negrita' pp. 407-419; María Crsitina García (1996); Gustavo Pérez-Firmat (1994); Cecilia Rodríguez-Milanés, 'Abuela Marielita', in *Iguana Dreams* ed. by Delia Poey and Virgil Suárez, (New York, Harper Perennial, 1992), pp. 287-296.

24 There is a scale by which an exile can be judged by the community. Those who left in the late 1950s and early 1960s consider themselves--and perhaps are considered--'superior' to those who left in the 1980s Mariel Boat Lift, for example, who were detained in the Croam Avenue Detention Centre after arrival in the US, as many of them, were seen as undesirable. See: particularly; María Cristina García (1996), op. cit., Chapter 2 'The Mariel Boatlift of 1980: Origins and Consequences'. pp. 46-80. García offers that 'Few immigrant groups elicited as much negative response as the *marielitos*' (p. 46); See also: Levine and Asís (2000), op. cit., pp. 46-63.

relationship they do not share with their parents. The flight into exile, however, supposes a loss that renders the inhabitants exiled in a translated world:

> For where in the United States will I Find *el bini-bini*
> or *la flora de la libertad, suerda con suerda?*
> But it goes further than that: I know
> I won't be coming back to live
> in my ex-homeland. A border has closed like a choice
> I can't take back. And the trouble isn't the new
> but the shadow falling across it of the old.[25]

Julia Alvarez's words articulate a particular concern: 'I had found the portable homeland where I wanted to belong'.[26] Alvarez finds the answer to her loss of homeland and the other losses that this conjures up, by situating herself in a moving or portable homeland. From the Dominican Republic, Alvarez, like the other writers aforementioned, gained prominence in the 1990s with the publication of her novel *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*,[27] which deals with the translations that must take place as a result of exile, and the feeling of belonging and not belonging. Although her examples are rooted in the Dominican exile, the sense of being in a portable homeland translates into other Latino realities such as the Cuban-American.[28]

El Pasado y la Abuela as Marks of Birth

The grandmother in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* and Pablo Medina's *The Marks of Birth* and book of essays *Exiled Memories: A Cuban Childhood* embodies tradition and home.[29] The possibility of a shadow falling over the old is erased as Celia and Pilar re-connect and Antón and Felicia re-establish their bond and her and Antón's essence is uncovered. These women re-inscribe on their depoliticised diaspora the Cubanness that was described by the colonising effect of fitting-in

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[25] Julia Alvarez , *The other side/El Otro Lado* (New York, Penguin, 1995), p. 147.

[26] Ibid., p. 117.

[27] Julia Alvarez, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (Chapel Hill, Algoquin, 1991).

[28] Ibid. *In the Time of the Butterflies* (New York, Plume, 1995); *Yo* (Chapel Hill, Algoquin, 1997); *Something to Declare* (Chapel Hill, Algoquin, 1998).

[29] Pablo Medina, *Exiled Memories: A Cuban Childhood* (1990).

within the space of empire.[30] The offspring are arguably depoliticised because they have not aligned themselves with any power. They simply exist in their space as a result of a decision taken by their parents years before. Politics are left outside this arena.

What are the marks of birth? Are they the rhythms of merengue inscribed on the Dominican or the notes of *Son* held in the Cuban *alma*? Are they the scores etched across the *bomba* and *plena* so that, when stroked, sound rhythms emanate from them, as the grandmother speaks through her offspring? Whatever they may be they make home a place or space that is not concrete or physical, but rather spiritual, but which can be moved and reconstructed in another place. The soul of home, however, continues to be spiritual. This again encourages the schizophrenia that is so visible in the exile community.[31] Location, a permanent, established home, is the most important space for some. Geographical location is, however, less important when Cristina García and Pablo Medina narrate their stories. The dislocation that results from exile from one's roots causes a later resurgence of an identification with that place and the self that was left behind.

Felicia's re-constructing of her home in Cuba in her new home in Miami is a signifier of exile, of what Salman Rushdie refers to as being 'haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt'.[32] In 'Imaginary Homelands', Rushdie observes that: 'it reminds me that it's my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time'.[33] Edward Said also discusses this feeling in his essay about exile.[34] Medina's Felicia chooses, however, to inhabit that past; not to move into the foreign present. Her actions ground the title of this chapter in her

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[30] The United States officially occupied Cuba after the Hispanoamerican war, to which the fallen eagle entombed in Havana is testament and a second time, less officially during the Batista era, when they floated the casinos and gaming houses, ending on 1 January 1959. Their involvement in Cuba has never been minimal, even when the American military was not present in the island. The term empire, or former empire would thus be appropriate for this relationship. It is not surprising then that so many exiles traveled to the US to escape this regime. Of course, the relationship is far more complex than these few words offer, and is the subject of a great many controversies.

[31] This is used as a sign of plurality and confusion, of being North American and Latino, Caribbean, and all the contradictions and confusion this 'dichotomy' implies.

[32] Salman Rushdie, 'Imaginary Homelands'. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London, Granta Books, 1991), p. 10.

[33] Rushdie (1991), op. cit., p. 10.

[34] Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* ed. by Rusell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Cornel West, (New York, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), pp. 357-366.

reality. She loves her home so much that she has recreated it wherever she travelled. She carries that home with her because she cannot forget it. The songs cited at the start of this chapter help to establish a location from which to begin a study of Cuban writing in exile. This location is neither in the homeland nor in exile, but in dreams of being in an ideal homeplace that was left behind. Although, as stated above, there is a blurring of boundaries between Medina's novel and essay, within similarity of *The Marks of Birth* and *Dreaming in Cuban* they also fragment at the point of intersection or common location; the geographical setting within Cuba. Medina's work deals mostly with urban life in Havana, and García's work, although partly set in Havana, is mostly situated in the town of Santa Teresa del Mar. This fragmentation signifies immediately a drastic difference in the social reality of the individuals involved. Life in Havana was like life in any big city and therefore, is not as easily compared with life in the country where comforts are not as readily available.[35] There is also a marked difference in gender relations between the two localities.[36]

Once the child re-connects with her/his grandmother, the keeper of the past, a re-inscribing begins on the body and mind. This act of re-inscribing over what was erased or forgotten, re-establishes a centre that takes the individual back to a space from whence s/he can attempt to understand her/himself. Pilar argues that she had always felt the need to reconnect with Celia and once she does she understands where it is that she belongs.[37] Antón's relationship with Felicia undergoes a similar transformation as Pilar's does with her grandmother. The transformation that takes place allows Antón to resolve the struggles within himself.[38] One issue that must be recorded is that however complete the initial erasure may have been the inscribing by the grandmother does not create a bipolar relationship. She merely enacts a re-birthing that uncovers a balance. She does not try to rid her offspring of their American characteristics, but instead incorporates Cubanness into the existent Americaness. Theirs is a spiritual awakening.

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35 Life in La Habana has always been considered 'superior' to life '*en la isla*', and those from La Habana consider themselves 'superior' to those from the country.

36 Gender would also pose a complication in the comparison of the books as women in La Habana were expected at that time to be genteel, and perhaps more confined to gender specific roles and modes of behaviour than would women of the country. Women of the country would, however, also have been expected to conform to certain gender related expectations and labour practices. See: Jean Stubbs's work on women and labour in Cuba. 'Women and Cuban smallholder agriculture in transition', in *Women and Change* op. cit., pp. 219-231.

37 See: García (1992), op. cit., p 235.

38 See: Medina (1994).

The very act of exile initiates a process of transgressions and transcendences that change the geography of home, affected by the grandmother, the spiritual agent of home in the foreign land, thus illustrating her archetypal presence. There is no longer an unrealisable need to be located within the geographically delimited, clearly demarcated contours of home because home is now portable. Rhythms are transitory. By being outside, a different perspective is gained.[39] Implicit in the works discussed here, as Medina illustrates when he states that '[l]ife in the United States for me has not been a search for roots (that presumes their loss)',[40] is also the fact that even in effective erasure there remains a remnant of memory submerged.

In García's novel the process of initial homogenisation is both facilitated and frustrated by Lourdes's diatribes against Fidel and the revolution. She alienates Pilar through her rabid anti-Cuban attitude and her pro-American stance. Lourdes appears homogenised by her attempts to fit in. Pilar is, however, not convinced by this hyper-Americanization and looks for herself in her grandmother. She finds not an alternative but a plurality that allows her to speak for all of herselves; the American as well as the Cuban, that leads to her re-birth.[41]

I wake up feeling different, like something inside me is changing, something chemical and irreversible. There's a magic here working its way through my veins. [. .] I'm afraid to lose all this, to lose Abuela Celia again. But sooner or later I'd have to return to New York. I know now it's where I belong—not *instead* of here, but *more* than here.[42]

In Pilar's rebirth there is no either/or. She is comfortable with her hyphenated-self. Her grandmother has had a great impact on her and she says that she feels her magic. When Pilar worries about losing her grandmother, she ultimately realises though that she cannot. Celia is indelibly printed on her unconscious. In *Spared Angola* Virgil Suárez describes a similar relationship between himself and his grandmother. Although Suárez focuses more on his grandmother's role as his teacher on many levels he also realises that she is an undeniable part of him and his imagination. This realisation in these works is similar to Medina's observations in *Exiled Memories* as his *bisabuela* was also his teacher, bringing history alive for him,

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39 See: Vigil Suárez *Spared Angola* (1997); Gustavo Pérez-Firmat (1994); María Critina García (1996); and Fernández Barrios *Blessed by Thunder* (1999).

40 Medina (1990), op. cit., p. (x).

41 See: María Cristina García (1996), op. cit., p. 186.

42 García (1992), op. cit., pp. 235-236.

and he can therefore never lose her as she is an integral part of who he is. These works illustrate how the writers hold their grandmothers' memories in their own collective unconscious. Her teachings form their imaginations, memories and also them for the rest of their lives. It is therefore significant that although they all describe a sense of loss either through separation or death, they also argue that their grandmothers are a part of them.

García represents the grandmother as a guardian angel, this transcendent relationship in a somewhat more illusory manner than does Suárez; locating the connection on a more spiritual, less earthly level.[43] García writes the connection explicitly in her text. She writes the link between Celia and Pilar from both their perspectives and illustrates a spirituality that exists although granddaughter and grandmother are separated by the sea. The narrator tells the reader of Celia and Pilar:

> Pilar, her first grandchild, writes to her from Brooklyn in a Spanish that is no longer hers. She speaks the hard-edged lexicon of bygone tourists itchy to throw dice on green felt or asphalt. [. . .] She knows that Pilar keeps a diary in the lining of her winter coat, hidden from her mother's scouring eyes. In it, Pilar records everything. This pleases Celia. She closes her eyes and speaks to her granddaughter, imagines her words as slivers of light piercing the murky night.[44]

The spiritual level on which their connection takes place is explicit in the narrator's description. Pilar tells her side of their connection. She emphasises that even though physically absent, her grandmother provides her with the strength that she needs to go through daily life.

> I feel much more connected to Abuela Celia than to Mom, even though I haven't seen my grandmother in seventeen years. We don't speak at night anymore, but she's left me her legacy nonetheless—a love for the sea and the smoothness of pearls, an appreciation of music and words, sympathy for the underdog, and a disregard for boundaries. Even in silence she gives me the confidence to do what I believe is right, to trust my own perceptions.[45]

Evidently, then, Celia encourages Pilar's self-realisation. Why is it that the grandmother in these works is such a symbol of location? What does she do for her

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[43] See: Suárez (1997).

[44] García (1992), op. cit., p. 7.

[45] Ibid., p. 176.

offspring? She is spirit and also magic. She holds the information to an entire part of Cuban tradition that she shares with her offspring. She does not accept limitations imposed on them or her.

This spiritual connection links generations to each other. There is a special link between grandmother and grandchild that flows through the region as the sound waves mix and fragment from *son* to *mambo* to *salsa*. The connection is not only physical in its obvious manifestations; it transcends into a spiritual realm. Celia and Pilar are connected in this way. Pilar tells the reader that her grandmother connects her to

herself. This is revealed to her through her search for self-discovery that takes her in many contrary directions, ultimately luring her back to Cuba and also the spiritual world that lives within her. She articulates her earlier, frustrated desire to reconnect with Celia.

> I envy this woman's passion, her determination to get what she knows is hers. I felt that way once, when I ran away to Miami. But I never made it to Cuba to see Abuela Celia. After that, I felt my destiny was not my own, that men who had nothing to do with me had the power to rupture my dreams, to separate me from my grandmother.[46]

Interestingly enough Pilar recognises this passion and it re-surges in her when she re-aligns herself with *Santería* in a *botánica* in New York.[47] What is Pilar's destiny? Symbolically, the men are responsible for a more complete isolation from home and the grandmother than any one else. These men are then seen as agents of subjugation; they insist on de-scribing and therefore defining the exile who must fit in in the new home.[48] Pilar illustrates her feelings of exile at the hands of these men to the reader:

> Most days Cuba is kind of dead to me. But every once in a while a wave of longing will hit me and it's all I can do not to hijack a plane to Havana or something. I resent the hell out of the politicians and generals who force events on us that structure our lives, that dictate the memories we'll have when we're old. Every day Cuba fades a little

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[46] Ibid., pp. 199-200.

[47] A *botánica* is a shop where herbal remedies, love potions, religious amulets, blessed pictures and other articles related to Catholicism and *Santería* can be bought.

[48] From Pilar's statement, these men appear to symbolise politicians who control access to countries and who decide who can or cannot travel . See: quote from pp. 199-200.

> more inside me, my grandmother fades a little more inside me. And there's only my imagination where our history should be.[49]

The generals and male politicians try to ensure that erasure occurs so that the rift between the old and the new grows as Pilar illustrates it does with her. They do this to ensure that the exile is successfully de-scribed of his or her Cubanness, Pilar argues, that the men attempt to sever the link between herself and Celia. Any link to Cuba is viewed by these men with suspicion, as a subversive act. The link is, however, spiritual and cannot be easily severed. In Medina's novel Antón tries to sever this link. Conversely, Antón is, in spite of his efforts to translate himself into an American, a result of his grandmother's constructing.

> Felicia had drummed into her grandson that his family was his destiny and his responsibility. Much as Antón fought it, her attitude prevailed, even after he left the island. Everything he did in New York, from playing baseball to going to a dance to taking an exam to ogling a woman on the street, seemed governed by her strictures. Her voice, soft and loving but inscrutable, had become imprinted in his mind. The more he tried to drown it out, the more his birthmark itched. It became his obsession to eliminate Spanish from his consciousness and make English the language of his thoughts and dreams. He whittled away at his accent and toned down his mannerisms so that they were controlled and Anglicized. If he became another person, surely her voice would disappear.[50]

Felicia seems to be physically present in Antón's life. His itching birth mark reminds him constantly of her, as she is a mark of his birth. She embodies Spanish memories which Antón desperately attempts to erase, to get away from by translating himself into an English speaker. Language is further connection to her. It is hoped that by effectively translating his life and himself into English, his grandmother, and his past will be erased. The constant itching of his birthmark, however, undermines his efforts. Moreover, he realises that his grandmother is a spiritual centre who moves with him wherever he may go. She is engraved in him, like his very skin. She thereby moves with him wherever he goes, in spite of his efforts to leave her behind. Antón could therefore never escape what his grandmother had destined him to be.

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[49] García (1992), op. cit., p. 138.

[50] Medina (1994), op. cit., p. 212.

Displacement/Relocation: A Moving Centre

Because the grandmother is central in her family and community, her home also becomes a centre where the community meets for renewal, healing, and a sense of self. She thus provides a space similar to those spaces discussed in the previous chapters. It is important to establish that, in any portrayal of the grandmother in Caribbean literature, exile is a significant trope because she is represented as a main link to the past which has been ruptured through the exile experience. Also, through her grasp on the past, she manages to maintain and disseminate traditions. This point causes a problematic relationship within the two texts as the perpetuation of traditions is proven and disproved. After exile, Felicia fits in automatically within a re-structured copy of her life on the island. Miami has become the heart of the Cuban community in exile. It is as if many parts of Havana were picked up and moved to Miami when the revolution occurred. One of these parts is Felicia's house and routine.

> With the furniture in place, Felicia fell into a routine she would follow until the day of her death, identical to the one she had observed in the homeland. [. . .] The highlight of her day came at mid-afternoon, when visitors called [. . .] who filled the empty places of Felicia's life with warmth and friendship, and with a prophecy or two.[51]

The community sits poised waiting for the day that they can all return to their original centre. They have not realised, unfortunately, that they have reconstructed a centre that no longer exists in Cuba as it does in Miami. Thus, Miami has become their centre and illustrates the spiritual level to the moving centre.

> Has anybody ever counted the number of Cubans who have died in Miami? Miami is a Cuban city not only because of the number of Cubans who live there but also because the number who have died there.[52]

However, a sense of temporariness is maintained. In the above quote Pérez-Firmat plays on the idea of temporariness built into the exile community. Medina furthers this theme by focusing on the rootlessness of the city as it exists on reclaimed land.

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51 Medina (1994), op. cit., p. 185.

52 Gustavo Pérez Firmat. 'Mirror, Mirror Mambo No. 5', in *Little Havana Blues* ed. by Virgil Suárez and Delia Poey, op. cit., p. 399.

> The truth was that nothing and no one in Miami had any roots. The city was built on water, or more accurately, the water had been drained from the land so that the city could exist. Left to its own devices, the water would seep back in and the land would revert to swamp and mangrove. Exiles were the perfect denizens of such a place, and they were making Miami, with the ocean on one side and the Everglades on the other, a fervent, distorted image of the larger, more permanent island they had left behind. Felicia went about settling in Miami with the clarity of someone who has more past to her life than future remaining.[53]

Perhaps this rootless existence is a way of dealing with exile and not admitting that the state one currently inhabits may be permanent. The writers articulate the importance of their spiritual centre over the physical location. Inherent in exile is the process of de-scribing the memory of home that occurs when one sets foot upon the new land in order to become a part of that new place. That de-scribing or translation can be most unobtrusive or perniciously violent experience. Celia refers to it as betrayal, like being pulled out of a place leaving a great part of the roots behind and planted in another place. One must forget the original in order to fit into the new. The displacement that is wrought by such transplantings may never be recovered. Many people within the community remain isolated from the outside world, functioning only within their immediate neighbourhoods. They never manage to translate themselves to become a part of a new home.

In both these works, *The Marks of Birth* and *Dreaming in Cuban* the grandmothers serve as metaphors for home as spiritual centre. In *The Marks of Birth* exile is complete and those exiled create their own microcosm within their new community. As Edward Said states:

> For an exile, habits of life, expression or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus the old and the new environment are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally.[54]

This contrapuntal existence can be clearly read in Felicia's life. The old co-exists with the new or in the new, except that the old far overshadows the new, or as Medina states: 'They made sure that whatever they had in the new land was a mere

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53 Medina (1994), op. cit., p. 184.

54 Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', (1990), op. cit., p. 366.

shadow of what they had left behind'.[55] This is particularly the case in Medina's novel as Felicia remains the same even though she has moved away from her island.

> In a year's time, a steady stream of weekly visitors were passing through her house because to be in her presence was to be taken back to what they used to be, what they used to know, and how they used to live. Outside was a present that did not belong to them, but inside Felicia's house the past lived, immutable and eternal.[56]

Felicia embodies the past, she is the owner of it, and as such people come into her world in order to reconnect with it and to grasp some understanding, be it tacit or active. Perhaps it is the hospitality Felicia, Lourdes and Mamamía offer that keeps their community coming back to their worlds; their centres where they can share and visitors feel comfortable. The nostalgia for the past roots the community around Felicia's house in Miami. She serves as a beacon to guide all the lost souls back to their essences. But this is not far removed from the reality she lived in her homeland. This is illustrated in Medina's, Pérez-Firmat's, and also Suárez's, descriptions of the old world.[57] The old world mixes with the new in Felicia's house. This resurfacing also extends to the spiritual life in the house. Felicia continues to welcome all the old spirits into her world. Exile does not mean that her spiritual connection ceases to exist. Rather, it remains as strong. Therefore Felicia, as is García's Celia, becomes the spiritual centre. Her centre thus allows her to transfer her spiritual knowledge to her offspring.

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55 Medina (1994), op. cit., p. 184.

56 Medina (1994), op. cit., pp. 185-186.

57 See: Suárez (1997)

Spirituality/*Espiritismo*: Grandmother as Anchor

Santería and/or *Espiritismo* as well as *Brujería* developed in the Caribbean and in Cuba in particular as a merging of Catholicism and African religions.[58] These religions are not limited to the archipelago, however, but rather re-create themselves or are recreated in exile, emerging in exile communities as strong as they are in the islands. This magic referred to often in these two novels is in part the connection to Cuban *Santería*. It is also the unique spiritual connection between grandmother and grandchild. Practices that may be seen as typically or essentially black practices have been Cubanised and thus are no longer only for the African diaspora that calls Cuba its home. One such aspect of culture is *Santería* or *Espiritismo* which is enunciated in both texts. García's Celia is, however, not as ardent a supporter or practitioner as is Felicia in Medina's novel. Inextricably submerged in the resistance to or reserved acceptance of *Santería* is the past. *Santería* and anything vaguely related to it were viewed with great suspicion and even contempt before the Cuban revolution as they were the beliefs of the black, working classes or the darker Cubans.[59]

Religion takes on a prominent role in these books. Medina illustrates how the line between Catholicism *Espiritismo* is blurred and blends in his house in the old world.[60] He describes his aunt Dinorah's relationship with religion and spiritual beliefs. This syncretism is common in the West Indies as documented in the other texts discussed here. Even when orthodox Western religion appears to stand alone there is often some colluded support given to it by indigenous beliefs and practices.[61] The term syncretism is probably most helpful, as even though there is some mimicry of the colonial master, the copy is not the same as the original, a new and different

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[58] *Espiritismo* is the belief in spirits, good and evil, which exist in the universe and must be pleased by an individual's behaviour. It also involves some acknowledgement of dead relatives' involvement in a person's life. See also Fernández Barrios connection to her grandmothers and her stating that they were *curanderas*.

[59] For more information on class ism and racism in Cuba see: As Benítez-Rojo discusses ,(1998), op. cit., pp. 54-55. The lines between Afro-Cuban beliefs, music, and expression, and Cuban beliefs has been greatly blurred by the revolution.

[60] See: Joseph M. Murphy, *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora* (Boston, Beacon, 1994); *Santería: African Spirits in America* (Boston, Beacon, 1990).

[61] See: Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizbeth Paravisini-Gebert. 'Introduction: Religious Syncretism and Caribbean Culture', in *Sacred Possessions: Voodou, Santería , Obeah and the Caribbean* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 1997), pp. 1-12; See also: Walcott 'The Muse of History' op. cit.

product has been created. Illustrating the blurring of boundaries between religions, Medina describes his Aunt Dianorah as holding both worlds in one hand.[62]

> Along with her Franciscan concern for the creatures of God, Dinorah had a streak of superstition as wide as a river. On her dresser were at least two dozen statues of different saints and a collection of glass elephants--purported to bring happiness, contentment, and a husband.[63]

This unproblematic merging or blending of the two is seen in both novels. Pilar illustrates that *botánicas* exist in New York and in Miami's Little Havana there is no shortage of them either. This may be a part of the portable homeland that Julia Alvarez describes. *Santería, Espiritismo, Brujería* become a part of everyday life, often times hidden from view, but nonetheless omnipresent. This illustrates what Derek Walcott refers to in 'The Muse of History' as rebirth in the New World and the new naming of things. These forms of religion are often used as alternative healing practices, as Fernández Barrios illustrates, ways of seeing into the future, manners of trying to ensure that bad things are kept at bay, and worship of ancestors and *orishas*. When questioned about these religions by an unknown person, many believers will deny any knowledge or understanding of them, other than to condemn them as evil or hearsay. These topics are not spoken of in everyday conversation with strangers. They are treated with the utmost respect and therefore the information about them may at first appear somewhat contradictory. There has always been a polemic relationship with the elite class of Cuba (or even the middle class) and Afro-Cuban religion, which has become a very important part of the Cuban life in the 1990s, before which it was viewed as a subversive act. Where *Santería* becomes a thorn in Celia's side in *Dreaming in Cuban* it is an essential part of life for Felicia in Medina's work. Perhaps Celia's discomfort with *Santería* stems back to the pre-revolutionary prejudices and also the suspicion of it in the early days of Castro's government. Her feelings could also be due to her disapproval of Felicia's involvement with it. García illustrates the complex relationship involved with *Santería/Espiritismo*. Beliefs are evidently passed down from generation to generation and seem to be taken as a part of life, as Celia illustrates the day after sleeping over at Felicia's house. She has had a bad night, full of unpleasant memories of her past, and also sees the evidence that her daughter has become mentally

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62 This mixing of religions is evidenced throughout the region. A family may attend the Church of England on Sunday afternoons, but they may also be baptised in the sea by another religion, very early in the morning.

63 Medina (1990), op. cit., p. 47.

unbalanced. The house was once her mother-in-law's, which is perhaps why her memories were stirred. Celia, therefore, visits a known spiritual centre.

> After her sleepless night in the house on Palmas Street, Celia wanders to the Ceiba tree on the corner of the Plaza de las Armas. Fruit and coins are strewn by its trunk and the ground around the tree bulges with buried offerings. Celia knows that good charms and bad are hidden in the stirred earth near its sacred roots. Tia Alicia told her once that the Ceiba is a saint, female and maternal. She asks the tree for permission before crossing its shadow, then circles it three times and makes a wish for Felicia.[64]

The ceiba tree is a symbol of great sacredness in many parts of the Caribbean, and a wish made to it is sacred. It is said that the wish maker will usually receive the answer to the wish. However, in this instance, Celia's wish is for Felicia and although the reader is never told what the wish is, it takes second place to Felicia's destiny. Felicia's life has already been marked and it cannot be altered by her wish. Expressly evidenced then is the enunciation of the blurred border between Afro-Cuban religion and everyday Catholicism and life. Celia, who disdains *Santería*, presents a contradiction. For many outsiders Celia's acts at the ceiba tree would be seen as merely superstitious, while for other people they would be viewed with approval and any other response would be seen as tempting the fate of evil. While Celia is sceptical and very critical of *Santería*, her daughter, Felicia, is fully involved in it and lives through it. García uses Celia to portray the ambiguous relationship the community has with *Santería*. She also clearly articulates the suspicion with which *Santería* and *Santeros* were viewed by the middle class community, as well as the prejudices that go along with the practice of *Santería*, and those that are embedded in Cuban society.[65] In a letter to Gustavo, Celia tells him that:

> Felicia took me to her best friend Herminia's house. Her father, Salvador, is a *santería* priest, an unassuming, soft-spoken man, black as the blackest Africans. He surprised me by serving us tea and homemade cookies. I'm not sure what I expected, I'd heard so many frightful stories about him. When I spoke about fighting Batista, he said it was useless, that the scoundrel is under the protection of Chango, god of fire and lightning. Batista's destiny, Salvador told me,

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[64] García (1992), op. cit., p. 43.

[65] *Santeros* are priests of *Santería*.

> is set. He will escape Cuba with a fortune in his suitcase, and die of natural causes.[66]

García's Felicia is very much involved with Herminia's family and *Santería* but her destiny is set, as Salvador tells Celia of Batista's destiny. When her sisters in *Santería* try to save her from her fate, their attempts are futile. It has already been decided and apparently no one but Felicia can alter it. It is speculated in the novel that perhaps this has begun with Celia naming Felicia after the friend she made in the asylum who had killed her husband. The importance of names in African religions and in the Caribbean is apparent at all levels of society. A *Santero* could argue that Celia has cursed Felicia by giving her the name of a woman who killed her husband and then burns in her bed; condemning her to repeating the same or similar acts in her life. Woven into the tapestry of the lives of these women is their knowledge/*sabiduría* of the eternal healing and spiritual arts. Medina's Felicia, paired with Marina the Seer becomes a well of indigenous wisdom. Medina establishes the unreliable reality of *Espiritismo* from the beginning of the book, but simultaneously grounds this in the relationship between Felicia and Marina.

Both writers employ *Espiritismo* in their novels, weaving it in and out of the stories of individuals as if the community would disappear without this life source. Throughout Medina's novel spiritualism is called upon to explain various problems in life. Despite Celia's circumspect acceptance but denial of *Santería* and, to a lesser extent *Espiritismo*, García illustrates how her life as well as everyone else's revolves around the belief, even in the shadows of an anti-Catholic revolution. It becomes apparent that spirituality is inseparable from the daily life of the people in the island and particularly in exile. In many ironic, perhaps paradoxical ways the grandmother becomes the initiator into this spiritual realm. There seems to be a level on which this spirituality is denied but it is simultaneously very much a part of life and teachings. By being the conduit through which the offspring learn of traditions the grandmother transmits this information to her youngsters oftentimes without being a practitioner of *Santería*.

Even though Celia is adamantly anti-*Santería*, as it interferes with her daughter Felicia's life, and finally leads to her death, her connection with Pilar is profoundly spiritual. She is alive in Pilar. Pilar herself is very powerful and spiritual. She tells her companion on her bus ride to Miami about her life in Cuba.

> I tell her how back in Cuba the nannies used to think I was possessed. They rubbed me with blood and leaves when my mother wasn't

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66 García (1992), op. cit., p. 163.

> looking and rattled beads over my forehead. They called me *brujita*, little witch. I stared at them, tried to make them go away. I remember thinking, Okay, I'll start with their hair, make it all fall out strand by strand. They always left wearing kerchiefs to cover their bald patches.[67]

The reader is left to conjecture whether Pilar actually achieved her goal. Celia's own powers and those of her daughters to conjure Jorge, husband and father--respectively, are ironic for a woman so set against *Santería*. These powers seem akin to some of the beliefs in *Santería*, but operate in Celia's world where *Santería* is not meant to enter. The paradoxes are deep. There is an insistence on spirituality pervading the novel and the lives of the characters without them ascribing to its doctrines. A natural spiritual presence seems to arise in many of the characters as Pilar points out. This ambiguous presence of *Santería* and spirituality deepens the link between Pilar and Celia and also between *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Marks of Birth* where there is always the existence of *Santería*, but also the silent acceptance along with the outward denial. Both novels posit an innate spiritual presence in the grandchildren that will manifest even without their knowing. This spiritual link is less visible in Medina's *Exiled Memories* and Suárez's *Spared Angola*, but is by no means absent. As the children grow up the grandmothers begin to teach them about themselves, helping them to understand various aspects; the superficial and those hidden from sight, that are a part of them. The grandmother's archetypal presence is once again established. Felicia teaches her grandson all that she knows, but insists on grounding him in the teachings of the Catholic church first. She also teaches the importance of paying attention to everyone around for whatever lesson they may have to offer. In this way Felicia is similar to Celia in García's novel, as they both teach their grandchildren to be independent entities. As Antón sees it, her teachings often collide with those of his mother:

> The night before he started first grade she told him the story of Pascual Babilonia, the shepherd boy who learned to read by asking passersby to teach him a word or two from a book he carried with him. The moral of the story, Felicia said to Antón, was that one learns from everyone, and one should not be afraid of asking questions, even of strangers. This last piece of advice went contrary to his mother's warning about speaking to people he did not know, but the boy listened in his usual passive way, much more anxious than attentive. The following day he was to be surrounded by strangers.[68]

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[67] Ibid., p. 28.

[68] Medina (1994), op. cit., pp. 67-68.

Perhaps Felicia realises the impossibility of moving beyond one's position in life without interacting with those around. She, like Celia, has lived life, she has experienced many things as she is older and has already raised her children, and therefore has knowledge that mothers may be reticent to share with their children. Celia and Pilar have a similar kind of relationship to Felicia and Antón. Felicia teaches Antón in her home in Havana while Celia teaches Pilar, who is in New York, from her home in Cuba. She encourages Pilar to move beyond barriers and boundaries erected by parents or anyone. These grandmothers discourage fear in their grandchildren. Rather, they try to replace it with courage and daring that will help them in the future. These two instances point to their awareness of the necessity to take the first step beyond the familiar in order to prosper in life. Pilar points out that:

> Abuela Celia and I write to each other sometimes, but mostly I hear her speaking to me at night just before I fall asleep. She tells me stories about her life and what the sea was like that day. She seems to know everything that's happened to me and tells me not to mind my mother too much. Abuela Celia says she wants to see me again. She tells me she loves me. My grandmother is the one who encouraged me to go to painting classes at Mitzi Keller's.[69]

Clearly articulated is the archetypal presence etched into Pilar's unconscious. Celia, while providing her granddaughter with the tools for survival, gently insists on maintaining their connection. Through Celia's insistence, art becomes Pilar's life, a great part of which seems to be discouraged by her mother because Lourdes views it as potentially subversive and a little too radical for her daughter. These grandmothers, however, see the potential in their grandchildren that the mothers may be afraid to notice. There is also an implicit understanding and acceptance of the unexplained, like spiritual healing, present in these older women that the younger women vehemently deny. When Antón is ill, and Felicia fears, suffering from schizophrenia, she and Marina prepare to exorcise the demons out of him. This meets with great disapproval from Rosa and a rift between the two results. This is Felicia's idea, however, of ensuring that the sickly child who seemed futureless at his birth would be spared and live on to make the family proud. The grandchild thereby becomes a repository for the grandmother's knowledge and ultimately her image.

Cartas, Biografias and Diaries: Writing Provides a Window into *el Alma*

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[69] García (1992), op. cit., pp. 28-29.

Writing is another form of repository in which the grandmother safeguards her story. Where the homespace in the previous chapter allows for **'talk'**, which passes on traditions and teachings in this chapter the **'talk'** is written. Both Celia and Felicia write for themselves and, through extension, their grandchildren. Celia, in García's novel, writes letters to her Spanish lover, whom she has not seen or heard from since he left Cuba and before her marriage to Jorge del Pino. It is Jorge who tells her to write to the Spaniard and says that he will marry her if Gustavo does not answer her letters. The narrator notes that: 'For twenty-five years, Celia wrote her Spanish lover a letter on the eleventh day of each month, then stored it in a satin-covered chest beneath her bed'.[70]

One can see this as a deliberate act to write her life, since she never sends the letters to Gustavo, thus eliminating another motive. She argues that she knows about Pilar before she is born, and therefore she could be consciously saving these letters for her. Celia herself argues for the de-construction of barriers in an early letter to Gustavo.

> The familiar is insistent and deadly. I study the waves and keep time on my wicker swing. If I was born to live on an island, then I'm grateful for one thing: that the tides rearrange the borders. At least I have the illusion of change, of possibility. To be locked within boundaries plotted by priests and politicians would be the only thing more intolerable.
>
> Don't you see how they're carving up the world, Gustavo? How they're stealing our geography? Our fates? The arbitrary is no longer in our hands. To survive is an act of hope. [71]

This letter comes after Celia's move to Santa Teresa del Mar and her life on the sea. She illustrates the importance of the ocean to her and also how our lives are at the mercy of others. Perhaps this letter is an encouragement to ignore boundaries that have been constructed to hem people in and to disallow movement across space. These observations reveal in Celia a personality that promotes change. She encourages Pilar to transcend these boundaries through their night time conversations. Arguably, Celia's deconstruction of boundaries in Pilar's life allows for what Glissant refers to as 'a daring new methodology' which, in this case, would be Pilar's ability to pass over obstacles placed in her way. Perhaps this is why Celia insists that Pilar not follow a similar path, but instead go beyond the old ways to

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[70] García (1992), op. cit., p. 38.

[71] Ibid., p. 99.

challenge society's and Lourdes's boundaries. Celia also establishes her firm belief in hope as a tool: after her hope has finished she dies. She provides a great deal of insight in her letters that speak of a character far more profound than she is given space to be, and her extreme frustration because of her severely circumscribed existence with her husband and being a woman at that time. She, however, stops writing to Gustavo on the date of her granddaughter's birth.

> The Revolution is eleven days old. My granddaughter, Pilar Puente del Pino, was born today. It is also my birthday. I am fifty years old. I will no longer write to you, *mi amor*. She will remember everything.[72]

This statement, of remembering everything, is tightly bound up in the novel and articulates the theme of continuity of the past, the link from grandmother to grandchild. The link is thus formed in an archetypal memory. She saves all the letters and gives them to Pilar, who is then in charge of the memory and its preservation. García weaves in the letters throughout as a way into Celia's thoughts and also as a monitor of various events in her life. Perhaps she uses letter writing as a form of preservation.

Meanwhile, Medina allows a different creation of life writing. Felicia writes Antón's biography; elucidating his past and his life so that he understands himself and perhaps her and why she took the decisions she did. Because the writer has given extremely limited knowledge of the contents of the biography and the letters Felicia writes, it is not possible to postulate the positive effects the contents could have on the readers. One can also read the writing of this novel as a re-enacting of the biography, but one which goes beyond the death of its author. The grandson has taken the story and rewritten it in his own words, but using his grandmother's story or biography as a foundation for it. The story has been passed on and is continued so that it captures Felicia's infirmity and death and goes beyond. The story has become ingrained in the collective memory. However, Medina employs irony to understate Felicia's importance in the community and also the significance of her act of writing. When Antón receives his biography from Celia's things:

> he unwrapped the package and read the brittle loose-leaf sheets. They contained his life, to the merest detail, from the instant of his birth to the moment of his reading. They spoke of all things and of nothing, of the family, of his power, of the need to accept his reality—Felicia the philosopher—and ended with her confession—Felicia the flagellant—that she tried to control and

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[72] Ibid., p 245.

> manipulate his life to suit herself. *I have nothing to leave you,* she concluded, *but my love and my blessing. The rest is up to you.*[73]

The last two sentences of this quote trivialise the importance of the biography. She states that she does not have anything to leave him, except her love and her blessing. Perhaps the biography is insignificant as Antón learned a great deal about himself before Felicia died. However, there is irony because this written document is arguably much more valuable than any other inheritance Felicia could give her grandson. Also, her blessing is a strong affirmation that, on one level, he will succeed in life, and also, it contains deep resonations and spiritual significations, on a more profound level. Nonetheless, the writing that Felicia leaves behind allows for a fuller understanding of the past as it puts things into their proper contexts. She also reinforces his importance within the greater scheme of things. Felicia also insists on writing everyone a letter that they read at her house after her death. Medina merges the two forms of writing; epistolar and biographical writing, to encourage a more profound knowledge of Felicia. In *Caribbean Discourse* Glissant questions whether the written record is 'adequate' for the 'archives of the collective memory.[74] Significantly here, Medina allows for the collective memory to construct its memories of Felicia through both forms of writing.

Symbolically, in the shadow of Felicia's presence the writer conflates all forms so that the spoken word, or the oral memory, which could be taken as the letters she writes, can be seen as though Felicia were speaking to each member of the group, and also to the collective. Thereby, the limits between the text and the spoken word can be said to be overcome as there is a communion with the spirit of the dead woman while the letters are being read. Both writers appear then to make deliberate attempts to enunciate the role of these women in their communities and their insistence on being read into the history. Perhaps this theme can be extended to argue that, similar to diary writing, which gives an in-depth, personal awareness of the individual in question and the events surrounding her/his life, biography and letter writing open a window into the personal. The letters and biography can function as if the person were speaking to the reader, as many of the formalities present in other forms of writing are done away with in a familiar letter to make room for a more stream of consciousness and a deeper intimacy. In teasing out this intertextual connection, this repetition of the grandmother as anchor, it is important to point out that both grandchildren, Pilar and Antón, are first grandchildren, so

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[73] Medina (1994), op. cit., p. 270.

[74] Glissant (1989), op. cit., p. 65.

they both have a certain responsibility to fulfil, along with enjoying the prestige of the position. They must in turn, pass the information on to the other grandchildren and other generations so that it becomes a part of the collective memory. This written document as link to the grandmother and the past. This way of conserving the past is unique to this chapter or these texts, as in chapter four, and also in chapter two, the link between the generations is not written, but is rather passed on through the oral connection.

Dreaming in Cuban but not in Cuba?

Because of Pilar's spiritual relationship with Celia, physical location becomes insignificant for them. They do, however, feel the pain of separation. Language here outdoes the importance of location. Pilar's dreams in Cuban are not only dreams in Spanish, but in Cuban Spanish. Virgil Suárez distinguishes between the language taught him by his grandmother and that he learns in schools. He says that: 'Not only did she help me to get started by telling me stories, but she also taught me the ways to listen to sounds'.[75] Perhaps Cuban becomes the language of dreams because it is in dreams when the individual explores profoundly meaningful aspects of self. It also becomes the key to the novel as a great deal of it occurs in the mind of the character. The unconscious is liberated so those details inscribed therein become more vivid in dreams. This link to the homeland and the grandmother relates to Gloria Estefan's lyrics that open this chapter. The rhythms of language are like '*ese grito de los tambores [y] una canción que vive entonando*'[76] as they sink into the psyche of the diasporic offspring. As the title of Medina's memoirs illustrates, these memories that the language embodies have been exiled to the nether regions of the mind. He sees the 'dubbing over' of his original version into English as 'window dressing on one's body or tongue or mind'.[77] By revisiting the sight of the memory or the spark of the memory, the grandmother, the person re-connects with the language and frees the memories or removes the 'window dressing'. Pilar's dreaming in Spanish is an indicator of this. The dreaming in Cuban then signals a free memory and a free unconscious mind. In the inscribing of their stories, the writers illustrate

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[75] Suárez (1997), op. cit., p.79.

[76] Gloria Estefan 'Mi Tierra' *Mi Tierra* 1993 Sony Music Entertainment. New York.

[77] Medina (1990), op. cit., p. x.

how their characters have been liberated so that their imaginations freely explore the areas in language that were closed to them before. It is symbolic that rhythms, as Suárez states, emerge in their writing, and in their creative imagination. In García's novel these rhythms seem to come back in dreams and in colours. Suárez also illustrates how his grandmother gave birth to colours by naming them.[78] Pilar's magic, discovered in Cuba, which she claims is 'working its way through' her is not dissimilar to the magic Suárez finds in his grandmother. This relationship that extends into the dreaming hours illustrates the profound link that has re-surfaced to bind the offspring to their spiritual home or centre. The binding is not, however, fixitive, but is similar to submarine roots.[79]

This re-birthing illustrated in the above quote from García's novel disallows a rupture that could potentially result from another physical separation. Pilar has uncovered parts of herself which she needed to identify in order to move on with her life. Pilar also expresses the fear of losing herself again, or this part of herself that she has unearthed here. As Lourdes worries that her pain has been subsumed in the earth, and is unwilling to let go, to surrender it and be healed, Pilar worries that her departure will result in loss.

> I'm afraid to lose all this, to lose Abuela Celia again. But sooner or later I'd have to return to New York. I know now it's where I belong—not *instead* of here, but *more* than here. How can I tell my grandmother this?[80]

Perhaps this fear of loss is unnecessary. Pilar moves with her home, her *raíces transcendentes* disallow this erasure, as she lives in many spaces simultaneously.

Medina sees his exiled self in another way. He articulates his prior need to rid himself of his Cubanness, but after supposing his success, he realises the impossibility of his task. In the preface to his memories of childhood he muses about his home and
identity.

> I thought that changing nationalities was as easy as changing clothes, speech patterns, books to read [. . .] nationality is in the soul if it is anywhere, [. . .] The Americanization I sought for so long required the annihilation of memory, that tireless lady who is forever weaving and

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78 Virgil Suárez, (1997), op. cit., p. 79.

79 See: Glissant (1989), op. cit., p. 67.

80 García (1992), op. cit., p. 236.

> unweaving her multicolored tapestries. I don't believe that anyone can do that naturally.[81]

Medina's observation fits squarely into Walcott's assertions that loss cannot be forced. Obviously, Medina has realised that he has been mistaken and rather than monolingual existence, his multiple-articulation allows him to more fully express his true self. His grandmother is intricately involved in his memory. Perhaps Garcia, in her multivocalic manner articulates her search for home more precisely in her novel than Medina does in his. Because of García's ability to move from one character into another she has uncovered silences in translation that have often resulted from a monovocalic male-rendered grandmother. Pilar's understanding and identification with Celia allows the reader to understand Celia. García's writing actually gives Celia her own voice. Although Felicia does speak in Medina's novel, her speech seems to often be monitored through Antón. Whereas with Pilar's description of her grandmother, Celia's voice and personality are released. Also, by incorporating the letters to Gustavo the reader is given a deeper understanding and/or insight into Celia's character. The reader is given access to an inner space within Celia that does not happen in Medina's novel. One begins to understand how and why she becomes the person she is. She tells Gustavo how the birth of her son affects her and all its implications in her life.

> Of my mother I remember next to nothing, only hard eyes that seem to float like relics in her forehead, and her voice, so queer and feathery. When she put me on the day-break train to Havana, I called to her from the window but she didn't turn around. I watched her back in a striped blue dress round a corner. The train was delayed a quarter of an hour. On the way to Havana, I forgot her. Only the birth of my son makes me remember.[82]

This explanation of her life allows the reader to see how Celia has been affected by, not only the birth of her son, the loss of her mother and her father and how she has forgotten these events perhaps to better enable her to deal with her sense of loss. Real forgetting, at the deepest level, is impossible. In these letters Celia has been given a voice to discuss herself that is absent in Medina's novel.

Repositories of Memories: The Grandchildren as Calabashes

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[81] Medina (1990), op. cit., p. x.

[82] García (1992), op. cit., p. 100.

Both Pilar and Antón become repositories for their grandmothers' memories. Antón's connection with Felicia is perhaps less pronounced than Medina's link with his great-grandmother, as he expresses in *Exiled Memories*. Where Pilar worries over the loss of Cuba when she leaves, Medina fears the loss of memory and story when his female ancestors die. This invokes Trinh's argument for the continuation of the grandmother's story through her offspring.[83]

> On visiting my great-aunt and my grandmother several summers ago, I was awakened to the fact that they and other old folks of the family would not live forever, and that the long twilight of their lives would soon come to an end. When they went, they would take with them the myths and folklore I had grown up with. That, I thought, should never be allowed to happen. And who better than I, who was born in the midst of this soup, simmered in it, then plucked violently away, to chronicle our past for those generations who had never lived it?[84]

The memory has become etched in the collective unconscious and can therefore not be easily lost. By observing this, Medina pays homage to the elders who have endowed him with his imagination. The grandmother and *bisabuela* have made him into the chronicler of their lives so that he becomes a repository for his ancestral knowledge. He simultaneously deposits all that he has been given into the written text to share it with the others in his community. In Medina's *The Marks of Birth*, his grandmother begins the chronicle of their past, and Antón is left to carry it on. There is a striking parallel between Medina's realisations at home with his elders and those that he creates in his fictional work. Explicitly articulated in both these texts is the need to maintain a memory of the past and also to find one's home, a home that, in both cases could never be exclusively in one place or the other. The grandmother, as metaphor, is essential. She is a signifier of home, and wherever she goes she carries home with her. It is that memory that situates the individual firmly in a place or position from which s/he is empowered. The grandmothers are the keys to this locating memory and the disseminators of a sense of self. They transcend politics and place to re-inscribe their offspring with their stories. Perhaps this becomes a political problem or a problem of necessary surrender of agency to be with family. Because of the nature of the 1959 revolution and all its implications, the answer to these may never be articulated as there is always a great deal of coding and recoding, of loud silences that cover any possible support with vehement

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83 Minh-ha (1989).

84 Medina (1990), op. cit., pp. ix-x.

denunciations. Felicia's version may never be heard as her family's own prejudices will overshadow her story because they are the ones who tell the story. On the other hand, Celia does allow herself to support the revolution openly, and the family in Medina's essay seemingly favour the revolution at the beginning. Where Antón once denied his Cuban-self, he ultimately reconnects with his grandmother and allows his Cuban-self to resurface.

> Antón, indeed [. . .] had finally allowed those elements that formed him at birth to manifest themselves in one definitive act. To an observer, flying to the island might have seemed desperate or insane, but that in no way detracted from its validity; quite the contrary, his temerity showed that his ancestry was bursting forth out of him, not in madness, no, but in folly.[85]

Sadly, Antón's awakening is locked into Felicia's death.[86] One can read a somewhat dependent relationship here, unlike Celia and Pilar, although, according to the text, their connection is completed in death. Pilar's metamorphosis is almost complete thus she will never lose her grandmother again. Celia will dwell within her forever. The connection between the two is complete. Their connection is not simple or superficial, but a mingling of two souls that re-establishes the link that bound them together, to ensure that there would be no rupture with the past. Once Pilar has realised her Cubanness and re-established her link, spiritual and mental, as well as physical, with her grandmother, her homeland, she can move on. Once Celia has taught her the skills of survival and introduced her to herself she is no longer at risk of being lost like Antón was before he re-connected with Felicia. Pilar tells Celia: 'So tell me how you want to be remembered'.[87] Celia's answer to that is: 'You don't have to do that, *hija*. I just want to sit here with you'. And she asks Pilar 'Are you going to stay with me, Pilar? Are you going to stay with me this time'?[88] Pilar and Celia know the truth intuitively without vocalising it. At this point Celia and Pilar transfer their spirit. Pilar describes this transferral of energy: 'As I listen, I feel my grandmother's life passing to me through her hands. It's a steady electricity,

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85 Medina (1994), op. cit., p. 273.

86 See: Paule Marshal's statement about living in her grandmother's shadow.

87 García (1992), op. cit., p. 232.

88 Ibid., p. 232.

humming and true'.[89] Celia shares her *sabiduría* with her granddaughter who will not stay with her in Cuba. They will, in spite of everything, always be together on the astral level. Celia is distraught that she has been left alone by her children. But, as she symbolically writes to Gustavo, Pilar will remember everything.[90] This day is significant as it marks a departure from a part of her life, but also an initiation into a new experience. Be that as it may, it does not lessen her anxiety at the sense of betrayal inherent in the dislocation of exile. The keeper of the home, the guardian of tradition and the link with the land and culture muses to Pilar:

> We have no loyalty to our origins, "Families used to stay in one village reliving the same disillusions. They buried their dead side by side. For me, the sea was a great comfort, Pilar. But it made my children restless. It exists now so we can call from opposite shores". Then she sighs, waiting for her next words to form. *"Ay mi Cielo*, what do all these years and separation mean except a more significant betrayal?"[91]

Within destiny, location, situation, these grandmothers continue to have an impact on everyone around them. This is evidently a result of their link to the other world; that which was left behind upon exile, a world old and new at the same time, a world of ancestral knowledge and wisdom that, without them, would be out of reach of the other generations. Felicia, Celia and Mamamía embody a binding rhythm that keeps generations in touch. They hold *sabiduría*, a profound understanding manifested through their love and caring that keeps their offspring united across vast space. Perhaps they act as translators so that people will speak a universal language that transgresses all borders.

Perhaps, like the Cuban *Son*, they can modify, even though they are tradition and memory, and adapt to a new situation, but always maintaining the old, thus never really completely changing. Medina answers these observations when he discusses Mamamía's life. He explicitly depicts how she connects everyone to everyone and to everywhere. She is the portable homeland, the portable past and memory. She is therefore, the archetype lodged in the community's memory:

> Mamamía was deeply mourned by all of us. She was our centre, the one person whom we all, without exception, respected and to whom

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[89] Ibid., p. 222.

[90] Ibid., p. 245.

[91] Ibid., p. 240.

> we referred in family matters. Everyone in our family has sometime born the resentment of another, has been slighted, envied, satirized. Not Mamamía. She was above any of it. Her presence was holy and it touched whoever was next to her. She died softly, as she had lived, and her spirit flew out to all of us, gave itself up so that we could gain.[92]

Even where Medina writes mourn, one can decode celebrate and carry-on. Inherent in mourning is a celebration of the life that has passed. In Mamamía's case she has touched many people and as such will be remembered long after her death. Her legacy will live on because she has become a part of everyone with whom she interacted. The quote illustrates a spiritual link that will never die, even in death. As she makes the transition she brings all her offspring and relations together, as does Celia and Felicia, which will be illustrated below. With them they take those *raíces transcendentes* and keep them rooted.

Raíz: Rooting the Offspring in Themselves

> Qué alegría sí señor...
> Aquí con toda mi gente,
> Y con gran admiración,
> Brindo esta celebración,
> De mis raíces transcendentes.[93]

As García's novel progresses there is a re-rooting, that takes place. This planting of the offspring of Estefan's *raíces transcendentes* in the homeland is not so much an actual physical act of completion as much as it is an act of re-inscription and re-membering. When Lourdes and Pilar return to Cuba and find Celia sitting on her porch after swimming the night before, they go through a ritual washing, that is described, not so much as ritual, but as necessary to prevent Celia from getting ill from the damp cold of the ocean and staying out all night. Although the re-membering is effected by both women, the collusion is complete. And, in spite of Lourdes's mixed emotions for Celia, she takes care of her. In the process of this Pilar tells the reader that: 'she squeezes my hand. "I'm glad you remember, Pilar. I always

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92 Medina (1990), op. cit., p. 86.

93 Gloria Estefan (1993).

knew you would"'.[94] The scene continues with Pilar enacting the nurturing relationship between them.

> I pull the covers over Abuela's shoulders, searching her face for a hint of my own. Her hair turned gray since I last saw her. Her black mole has faded. Her hands are stamped with faint liver spots.
>
> I know what my grandmother dreams. Of massacres in distant countries, pregnant women dismembered in the squares. Abuela Celia walks among them mute and invisible. The thatched roofs steam in the morning air.[95]

Pilar discloses the process of occlusion and collusion that takes place between the two women, first and third generations. There is a significant relationship or sharing that develops through their hands and their conversations. Celia's stories, grandmother's stories carry on from generation to generation, but through the female line.[96]

> Abuela Celia is in her wicker swing looking out to sea. I settle in beside her. There's a comforting wilderness to Abuela's hands, to the odd-shaped calluses, the split skin on her thumb.
>
> "I put on the ruffled dress she had made, a hat with ribbons, and patent-leather shoes, the first I ever wore. My feet felt precious, tied up like shiny parcels. Then she left me on a train and walked away."[97]

Celia has told Pilar of the relationship between herself and her mother, not unlike Pilar's relationship with Lourdes, except that Lourdes does not send Pilar off to live with richer relations. This seems to be a symbolic act. The separation between mother and daughter provides space for the bonding between grandmother and granddaughter. Also clearly articulated is the merging, the energy flow from one to the other as they transfer life force. Medina shares this sentiment in his essay when his *bisabuela* dies. '[H]er spirit flew out to all of us, gave itself up so that we could

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94 García (1992), op. cit., p. 218.

95 Ibid., p. 218.

96 See: chapter four and chapter two for more information.

97 García (1992), op. cit., p. 222.

gain'.[98] This is similar to Pilar's observation 'As I listen, I feel grandmother's life passing to me through her hands. It's a steady electricity, humming and true'.[99]

Unlike Felicia, Celia begs for Pilar to remain with her. She is very much aware of the connection between them. Felicia, as seen, sends her family away in the hope that they will be safe. Perhaps these differences are due to social position and political affiliation. They are also affected by the Turner family's residence in Havana, therefore within close scrutiny of the new powers. Notwithstanding speculation, such possibilities remain as uncertain because of the tricks of memory. However, Celia, in her role of 'well-rounded' woman, demystifies Pilar about the various aspects of the constructs of womanhood, where women often limited to the 'ideal' one mate for a woman, (particularly in pre-revolutionary Cuba) Celia, would most likely have been viewed as a scarlet woman because of her pre-marital affair, and shrouded in her parents' house with no allusion made to her past at all. Jorge marries her because of her past, which he then uses as a reason to persecute her. Celia gives all the details of her-story so that Pilar can move on, without making her mistakes.

> There was a man before your grandfather. A man I loved very much. But I made a promise before your mother was born not to abandon her to this life, to train her as if for war. Your grandfather took me to an asylum after your mother was born. I told him all about you. He said it was impossible for me to remember the future. I grieved when your mother took you away. I begged her to let you stay.[100]

There is so much said and unsaid in Celia's pain. She tells Pilar about the hardships, but she also tells her how much she wanted to keep her in Cuba with her. Celia also states that she wanted to make Lourdes a warrior. Her desire is not realised with Lourdes as such, although Lourdes does survive well. Celia's desire is more fully realised with Pilar. She teaches her how to fight to survive in the outside world. It is also interesting how the writer uses the term 'remember the future', which in its literal sense is impossible, but taken as a foreshadowing through psychic or spiritual connection with the past and thus the future is completely understandable particularly within the context of this book of everyday spirituality. The fact that in García's novel, where the narrator does not dream in Cuba, or a fixed place, but

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[98] Medina (1990), op. cit., p. 86.

[99] García (1992), op. cit., p. 222.

[100] Ibid., p. 222.

rather in Cuban, makes the dreams transitory, non-static. These dreams can move from past to present, to future and back. They can flit from New York to Cuba and see everything that goes on without seeming improbable. There is a general acceptance of knowing what will occur before it actually does: Felicia knows that Antón is coming and what he has to do in his life, before he has grown into an adult. This could be seen as a further focus on the spiritual aspect that the dreaming in the title holds. Pilar also describes the relationship that continues through her grandmother's sharing. By sharing her correspondence with her granddaughter, Celia allows for an even further conflux with her granddaughter. There is a knowledge, knowing, that comes from reading these intimate documents which allow the women to grow even closer. It is hinted that perhaps Pilar will learn to be a stronger person through her grandmother's example.

Felicia and Celia pass their wisdom through the written word. There is a literal handing over of information in both García's and Medina's novel. Significantly, there is also a handing over of a book of García Lorca's poetry, an art form with which Celia identifies and loves greatly. Perhaps this is a key to understanding Celia's passion for life and art.

> Abuela gives me a box of letters she wrote to her onetime lover in Spain, but never sent. [. . .] She also gives me a book of poems she's had since 1930, when she heard Garcia Lorca read at the Principal de la Comedia Theater. Abuela knows each poem by heart, and recites them quite dramatically.[101]

The juxtaposition of letters to García Lorca's poetry seems to 'place' the grandmother within a literary tradition which also indicates a certain amount of education and, certainly, a sense of the need to question limitations placed on them. As Celia liberates her story by giving Pilar her letters and her stories, Medina's Felicia also releases preoccupations about Antón. Nearing the end of her life, Felicia reconnects with her friend, the Seer, Marina, now Marina la Ciega. By so doing she can liberate her knowledge and conflate it with Marina's. At this point of merging secrets that Felicia has not seen are brought to the surface. Marina tells Felicia that Antón 'is not [lost]. Medina articulates a strong belief in destiny.

> There are no accidents in life. He is teaching himself a lesson. [. . .] That he can only be fulfilled in blood, the past and the future are one in the present, that he's already been marked to do what he has to do

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101 Ibid., p. 235.

> no matter how he roams. He will learn to trust the inner light, but that is irrelevant to you right now, you have very little time left.[102]

Marina articulates the crux of the story in her words to Felicia. She insists that Antón is only doing what he must in order to carry on what Felicia is leaving in his hands. Medina encapsulates Felicia's preparations for the end of her life in ironic eloquence. With it he exposes the deep rootedness that she has, as head of the family. Like García's Celia, Felicia, must meet with her family before she dies in order to pass on what she knows.

> The lady took to her preparations with a zeal that, while unsettling the younger family members, nevertheless made her age gracefully in their eyes and kept from them the sense of dread that burdens families when one of them teeters at the edge of darkness. Much needed straightening; words had to be said, hurts healed, friendships concluded, angers explained, secrets unveiled, illness borne honorably in silence, and her memory assured.[103]

Poignantly stated is the merging between written and oral, where both come together to entrust the memory to the collective unconscious, as well as the conscious memory. The written text alone may not have been sufficient to create such a vivid and lasting image of Felicia in her loved ones' minds. The ideas of healing and closure before passing on are present in both texts. This underscores the power and control of the grandmothers, even when standing on the brink of death. The realisation that one must close one's life peacefully appears in both novels. García and Medina illustrate how their characters begin the process of physical closure with their community.

In their silent process they have figured out how to survive, even after death. These characters also give advice that should encourage their offspring to keep going. '*Coco duro, cuando el mar está de cagar, no valen guayabas verdes*'.[104] Never give up, surrender to the sea, and always roll with the hard times it gives you: this is the philosophy to live by, according to the grandmothers.

The Importance of Closings

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102 Medina (1994), op. cit., p. 247.

103 Ibid., p. 247.

104 Cuban saying that tells the listener to keep going, even in the face of adversity.

In the effective re-inscribing of Cubanness on their grandchildren, these grandmothers help in the remembering of their histories. Felicia effects this in a somewhat non-conventional manner; planning her whole death before she dies. Moreover, Felicia goes beyond simply having an impact on Antón's life. She has an impact on everyone's life. 'All had been arranged before hand, and the only thing left to do was read the stale, faded letters she had left behind'.[105] On one level Felicia is reduced to this faded tangible remainder. But her legacy and that which is written into the tangible is much richer and more valuable than an everlasting bright remainder. She is a reminder of themselves. She re-inscribes Antón with himself and his family through the act of her writing their story, her story and history. When she dies, the gathering at the hospital and at her home mirrors the gathering at the hospital when Antón is born at the beginning of the novel. Both are celebrations that are important to this community.

> By mid-morning the family had gathered at Felicia's house waiting for the funeral home to open and the wake to proceed. All had been arranged beforehand, and all that was left to do was read the stale, faded letters she had left behind. [. . .] Felicia the flagellant--that she tried to control and manipulate his life to suit herself. *I have nothing to leave you,* she concluded, *but my love and my blessing. The rest is up to you.*[106]

As demonstrated above, Medina fills the pages with the traditions, where families gather to celebrate the beginning of life and also the end of life, that have been passed on through generations, however subtly worded and unadorned he may have sketched them. He offers a glimpse of the party at the wake, each of whom has particular importance for Felicia and for her status as a Cuban exile grandmother. Once again the idea of community, although not as clearly articulated, perhaps, as in other works, is strongly implied in this gathering. Even when the party is still at the hospital, the celebration that seems not far removed from a spiritual send off is clearly drawn: from the drinking and smoking to the rhythmic drumming that alerts the ancestors of the imminent arrival of one of their own. Perhaps the process described above and bellow can be seen or read as a multiple-articulation of the various levels of existence; the spiritual, the physical and the emotional. Felicia is a

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[105] Medina (1994), op. cit., p. 270.

[106] Ibid., p. 270.

Cuban exile grandmother, but she has become grandmother or ancestral link for all the people gathered at her passing.

> he observed the people who had gathered to pay their respects: From Marina la Ciega and the others of Felicia's surviving classmates, [. . .] Some he had never seen before; others had never seen him. All, however, recognized his stature as firstborn grandson and alluded to events in a history he had no memory of. He returned their kisses and embraces and joined in their laughter. It was all he could do to keep Felicia's spirit alive.[107]

It is then Antón's responsibility to keep Felicia's spirit alive. In the Caribbean tradition the grandmother elder will have to give her power on to another in her line. Antón has received Felicia's power and thus moves into a position of importance within his community. That is not to say, however, that Antón's will be an easy and automatic ascension. He, it seems will have to work hard to attain the level to which he has been challenged by his ancestors. Even if his link and ascension is never articulated out loud, the community accepts him. At the end of the novel Felicia is 'rained' over the Boulevard of Fallen Heroes. Antón takes her ashes in the plane and empties them into the air so that they fall on Cuban soil.

Dreams Re-examined

Conflating the two realities and reading the texts together, albeit polemically, this thesis has described the manner that García, through her multivocalic novel has given Celia a voice of her own. She, as a woman novelist has captured a part of Celia's character that is often missing in some men's writing. García has allowed an individuality to her character, even if it is pro-revolution, and not aligned with the beliefs of the rest of her family. She has gone beyond a comfortable narrative where all differences are resolved, into an assertion of self. Medina has not done this to the same degree. He has allowed his character a certain amount of individuality, but has not given her the same independence from the rest of the characters. In a manner of speaking, Felicia's politics finally end up in line with those of her family, so that there is a complete resolution at the end. Medina does not allow Felicia her own space to develop her own life. She must live through Antón.

Celia lives with or without her diasporic children, but age and loneliness take their toll. Felicia lives mostly through her diasporic children, she relies almost

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[107] Medina (1994), op. cit., p. 271.

entirely on Antón, and most of her final preparations go toward the potential that he will come into his own. These grandmothers treat their grandchildren equally regardless of gender. Although Felicia only has Antón and no granddaughters, Celia treats Pilar, as an equal to any boy. Celia, deconstructs male superiority by insisting that Pilar go as far as she can in life and to succeed. These characters go beyond any limitations of gender roles. She realises that her, Celia's life, would have been different if she had not been with her husband. Perhaps, had the Spaniard remained, she would have succeeded in other areas instead of being institutionalised because her mother-in-law and sister-in-law drove her crazy through their spite and jealousy. She, like Medina's Felicia, is somewhat trapped in the constructs society hems them into of the respectable middle class woman, wife and mother. Medina writes of his experiences with his grandmother as an only child in his fiction, but he also has the privileges of being the first grandson. His privileges are thus easier to understand because he has a special role in the family. He will be the bearer of ancestral knowledge. By going into exile outside of Miami the characters in these novels are more easily able to circumvent the constructs and expectations of their community, an extremely conservative and traditional community, particularly as regards gender roles and self-realisation. The grandmothers herein have effectively thrown off the constraints of gender divisions as far as they are able to for Celia a possibility that came with the 1959 revolution.

The exploration of the multivocalic rhythm of the archetypal grandmother or repetition of themes that cross the novels, memoirs, and essays is important through teasing out an interrelated strategy, through reading intertextually and transgenrely that this fuller blossoming of the themes searched for is revealed. It is precisely through the junctures of interconnections that one can understand the power the grandmother has within her fictional community and how she emerges throughout various independent texts. Aligned together, the texts uncover submerged repetitions, as Benítez-Rojo argues, repeating a Caribbean rhythm.[108]

Celia and Felicia are marked by departure and return. Felicia has possibly gained as much, by leaving, as Celia has by living in her revolutionary home. It is no mistake that Pilar is born on Celia's fiftieth birthday and will remember everything. Perhaps this is why Celia's words to Pilar, when she tells her that exile is just 'a more significant betrayal',[109] are so catastrophic, in terms of a future. As both writers explicitly state, the important issue here is of remembering a past that is in danger of

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[108] Benítez-Rojo (1996).

[109] García (1992), op. cit., p. 240.

loss because of exile. But, simultaneously and possibly more importantly, not living the past, rather having it live in them. Therefore, what is the necessity of going home physically if memory can provide a metaphorical return? Medina states the impossibility of a return in his essay:

> The truism that no one can ever go home again becomes a special predicament for the young exile: my childhood lies inside the bowl of distance and politics, unapproachable and thus disconnected from my adulthood. [. . .] I remember the family, their craziness, their resilience, their collective tongue wagging wildly at despair, and I too smile. They have given me a home made of materials nothing but death can breach.
>
> As long as there is blood in my veins, as long as there are words on my tongue, stories to be told, the house stands and leans freely into the future. Whatever winds may come, welcome.[110]

One can interpret this ending and García's, which follows, to mean that they no longer need to go home. Instead their grandmothers, who are metaphors for home, who are the locating factors in their lives have firmly placed them in their sense of home. Home transcends boundaries. The unity is therefore submarine. It is no longer a physical place, rather an emotional or spiritual space. It is the act of remembering the past and then articulating the reality that enables one to find home wherever one is conjuring grandmothers. By reconnecting with the ancestral knowledge embodied in these women the younger generation is able to construct an identity or sense of self that allows them to create a home wherever they may situate themselves. When Celia finally decides that her life must be altered, that perhaps her connection with her offspring must be existential and not physical, she steps into the tropical sea that ebbs and flows around the island. She descends into the same sea that washes onto the shores of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Miami and New York. By merging with the sea she has effected a complete transcendence into immortality.

> Celia steps into the ocean and imagines she's a soldier on a mission—for the moon, or the palms, or El Lider. The water rises quickly around her. It submerges her throat and her nose, her open eyes that do not perceive the salt. Her hair floats loosely from her skull and floats above her in the tide. She breathes through her skin, she breathes through her wounds. [. . .] Celia closes her eyes and imagines it drifting as a firefly through the darkened seas, imagines its slow extinguishing.[111]

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110 Medina (1990), op. cit., pp. 113-114.

111 Garcia (1992), op. cit., pp. 242-244.

She is now the bridge that connects her world to the world her grandchildren live in. Celia becomes the submerged unity. She, if there is ever to be a travelling metaphor between these places, will join them. Her rhythm, like all the other grandmothers, will flow, ebbing and rising, across space and place, allowing continuation, even in the fragmentation. Her *raíces* still *transcendentes,* become submarine. The song continues to intone *qué sigua la tradición*. Where Estefan writes *canción* insert grandmother, so that the grandmother embodies a continuation, her presence intones continuity. This insertion thus renders:

> Y aunque el tiempo pasará,
> Es nuestra responsabilidad,
> A través de la [abuela],
> Servir como educación,
> Y seguir la tradición...[112]

Celia and Felicia are that tradition. They move across time and space. Geographical *fronteras* are transgressed by the connection between grandmother and grandchild and the grandmother's memories and traditions, linking the diaspora to their home. Felicia and Celia, maintain a close spiritual link with their offspring and they act like a grounding force in their lives. The grandmothers become a current that washes across their offspring to re-inscribe them with a sense of self: *La corriente que a mi me llama*[113] *grita duro y no me deja solo*. *Lo que bien se quiso nunca se olvida* because it is always in the soul, *en el alma,* the home that will always go with the individual, grandmother will make certain of that. *¿Por qué? Porque*

> La llevo por dentro ¡como no!
> Canto de mi tierra bella y santa,
> Sufro ese dolor que hay en su alma,
> Aunque estoy lejos yo la siento
> Y un día regreso yo lo sé.[114]

The return may only be possible to find where one belongs and to move on. Even if the return is only metaphorical or spiritual. The rhythm of the grandmother as

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112 Gloria Estefan. 'Tradición', (1993).

113 Celia Cruz 'De La Habana Hasta Aqui.' *Azucar Negra* 1993 RMM Records and Video, Sony Discos, Miami.

114 Gloria Estefan (1993).

metaphor for home ebbs and flows with the tides, is always inside, and remains, a portable homeland.

Chapter Four:
'Tan fe tan tan lese tan': Homespace and Healing in the Francophone Caribbean

C'était une vieille femme noire et maigre, ma marraine.[1]

I come from a place where breath, eyes, and memory are one, a place from which you carry your past like the hair on your head.[2]

On reading Antillian literature in French or French *Créole* in search of depictions of the grandmother one must first consider the space allowed women similar to M'man Tine and Reine Sans Nom or procured by them (beyond the savages of the canefields)[3] which Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* explores.[4] Walker argues that the only space allowed these women is their cooking and their gardens, where they create great beauty and here they are able to survive. In Simone Schwarz-Bart's novel, *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*, one is taken back to the garden as clearly delimited, demarcated space as the fullest expression of women's creativity.[5] Home space or place then takes on primordial importance.[6] The novelists discussed in this chapter tell the story of both Martinican and Guadeloupean grandmothers' transgressing of boundaries to own a space of her own in which she and her offspring can speak and collude to live life to its fullest in the face of outside occupation. The granddaughter goes back to her grandmother's garden because it is where she can find the stories that help to define who she is. By leaving the community, a character such as Zobel's José takes the stories with him so that he will later become the 'wri-teller'. This chapter poses, therefore, that the grandmother is the conduit through whom ancestral teaching is passed on in the face of exploitation and hostility in the master's canefields. She teaches her grandchildren creole survival strategies that allow them to regenerate their histories and traditions. It is her voice that is heard when her grandchildren speak. The

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1 Joseph Zobel, *La Rue Cases Nègres* (Paris, Présence Africaine, 1974), p 186.

2 Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (New York, Vintage, 1994), p. 234.

3 See: Janis Palma, 'Vienen tumbando caña (todavia)', in *Historia y Género* op. cit., pp. 105-121.

4 Alice Walker, 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens', in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovitch, 1983), pp. 231-243.

5 Simone Schwarz-Bart, *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1972).

6 For discussion on home space see: chapter two for details, see also: bell hooks (1990); hooks (1989); George (1996); Carole Boyce Davies (1994); Houston A. Baker Jr, *Workings of the Spirit: The Poetics of Afro-American Women's Writing* (Chicago, Chicago UP, 1991); Bachelard (1969); Tuan (1977); Bhabha (1994);

grandmother is the holder of ancestral knowledge and, through her teachings, she passes on to her offspring healing powers, her stories, and the ability to survive.

Background and Space: Linking Writing with Life

The texts considered here provide a sampling of varied works produced not only within the Francophone region but also outside its geographical borders. Zobel's *La Rue Cases-Nègres* was written in exile from Martinique, while Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* was produced after a return to the writer's native Guadeloupe. Both writers were educated on their respective islands and then in France. After completing his education, Zobel worked in Africa for many years. He has published numerous novels and collections of short stories, most of which draw heavily on his experience with his homeland of Martinique. [7] Perhaps it is precisely because of the experience of exile that he can capture with such poignancy the images of home. Interestingly, Zobel did not experience the kind of lasting notoriety which other Caribbean writers did during the same epoch and after. A new interest has, however, been recently sparked in his work. Schwarz-Bart returned to Guadeloupe after marrying her now ex-husband, André Schwarz-Bart, with whom she co-wrote *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes.*[8] Similar to Zee Edgell in the Anglophone Caribbean, when Schwarz-Bart first published, she was one of the few women publishing during the period and so her work filled a gap left in West Indian literature where there were few stories of women's lives as related by themselves. After the publication of *Pluiet et vent*, Schwarz-Bart published *Ti Jean L'horizon*, a novel that deals with the mythical figure of Ti Jean.[9] The novel fuses Caribbean reality with Caribbean myth, much like *Pluie et vent* does. Her most recent publication is the play *Ton beau capitaine*. The writers, although separated by almost twenty years: Zobel began to publish in the late 1940s and Schwarz-Bart in the late 1960s, their works point to similar experiences. Both articulate the voices of the impoverished population caught up in slave-like labour. Their capturing of life, as

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[7] Joseph Zobel Les mains pleines D'oiseaux (Paris, Nouvelles Édition Latines, 1978); et si la mer n'etait pas bleue (Paris,Éditions Caribeennes, 1982); Le soleil partage (Paris, Presence Africaine, 1964); Diab'La. (Paris, Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1946).

[8] Simone et André Scwarz-Bart, *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1967).

[9] Simone Schwarz-Bart, *Ti Jean L'horizon* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1967); *Ton beau capitaine* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil Théâtre, 1979).

they have seen it, is perhaps more detailed due to their time in exile. A nostalgia and a depth of understanding that binds them to their homes surfaces in their writing. Significantly, both writers incorporate *Créole* language patterns and rhythms into their works, which would have differed from the established norms of the time, and that elucidate the deeply nuanced culture captured in the text.

The secondary texts herein examined were also created by writers in exile, for example, Edwidge Danticat based in New York.[10] Danticat illustrates how similar themes repeat across the Caribbean even when the writers move beyond their geographical homes to establish themselves in a metropolitan centre. These texts span five decades of French Caribbean writing which also elucidate the timeless nature of the grandmother figure.[11] The novels also illustrate that, though separated by political differences, with Haiti asserting its independence in 1804 and, thus, becoming an abomination to France and the rest of the colonial world, while Guadeloupe and Martinique remained part of France, they speak of a common inheritance. Ivette Romero-Cesareo comments on Schwarz-Bart's novel: 'In [. . .] *Pluie et vent* links with Africa are kept alive through generations of oral history. *Pluie et vent* offers a genealogy tracing the Lougandor family's roots to Africa and the "living" proof of a survivor, Ma Cia, born into slavery'.[12] This link to the past is a significant part of the story and is arguably made possible solely through the existence of the grandmother.[13] Myriam Chancey also examines the significance of the elder woman in the community and how she is the one who holds the past and the one who must pass it on to the next generation.[14] Immortality can be extended to include the transference of themselves and their teaching to their grandchildren. Though they remain physically mortal, they become spiritually immortal. Schwarz-Bart clearly

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10 Edwidge Danticat (1994).

11 For more instances of the importance of the grandmother in Francophone literature, See; Gisèle Pineau, *l"Exil Selon Julia*. (Paris, Stock, 1996), and *Un Papillon dans La Cité* (Paris, Éditions Sépia, 1992).

12 Ivette Romero-Cesareo, 'Sorcerers, She-Devils, and Shipwrecked Women: Writing Religion in French-Caribbean Literature', in *Sacred Possessions*. ed. by Margarite Fernandez Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, p. 262; Catherine Le Pelletier, *Encre Noire: La Langue en liberté*. (Paris, IBIS Rouge Editions, 1998). p. 159; See: John R. Gillis, 'Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship', in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* ed. by John R. Gillis. (Princeton, Princeton UP, 1994), p. 3.

13 Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (London, Harper Collins, 1990).

14 Myriam J. A. Chancey, *Searching For Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile* (Philadelphia, Temple UP, 1997), see pages 62-77 especially. Although she deals mostly with Beryl Gilroy, her analysis can be taken into consideration in this case.

locates her novel in the realm of oral history with the grandmother and her female kin, the source, as the axis around which the tale spins.

Schwarz-Bart's work examines the life of rural Guadeloupe where three generations of Lougandor women, who begin their free existence in L'Abandonée, live their lives. Télumée, the narrator, tells her own tale of life, beginning with her great-grandmother, Minerva, through Toussine, Reine Sans Nom, to Victory and her daughter, Télumée, and ending with Télumée's adopted daughter, Sonore. The story tells of the hardships of life, the migrations around the island which these women undertake, and the men they meet on the way. The narrator also situates her tale in post-emancipation Guadeloupe. There is only a very distant memory of slavery that Télumée is only vaguely aware of until she realises that slavery was a real event in her own land. She sees how much of her life is at the mercy of the *béké* planter.[15] Télumée speaks of the natural and supernatural together, weaving them through her story, and illustrating how the community of women draw together in order to prevent erasure and to overcome hardship and suffering.[16] Télumée talks about her life growing up in the shadows of her grandmother, far removed from the world of the 'big city' and all that it entails.

The novel intersects here with Joseph Zobel's work. Both novels detail the relationship between grandmother and grandchild and the bonding and transference of information that results. José, Zobel's protagonist, also grows up in a rural community brought together by poverty and hardship of being cut and gnarled by life among the cane. This time, the community is in Martinique and José moves to be with his mother in the big city. The time spent with his grandmother, however, psychologically forms him for the rest of his life.

This chapter recognises the vast divide between Haiti, Martinique, and Guadeloupe as regards politics, the agency of the peasantry, and freedom of speech. Despite threats of death, there is still an insistence on speaking out, so the so-called subaltern, speaks even if in code. When M'man Tine is raped in the canefields in Martinique and Télumée is objectified in the master's house in Guadeloupe, and Edwidge Danticat writes of the Haitian woman's experience, albeit fictionalised, with sexual exploitation the idea of freedom becomes problematic.[17] This renders

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15 *Béké* is used to refer to the white/Creole plantation owning class in the French Caribbean.

16 See: Fanta Toureh, *L'Imaginaire dans l'oeuvre de Simone Schwarz-Bart : Approche d'une mythologie antillaise* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1986).

17 See also: Anne-christine d'Adesky, *Under the Bone* (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994); Edwidge Danticat, *The Farming of Bones* (New York, Soho, 1998).

free expression as somewhat contentious. The idea that these female characters are free to express themselves as they wish is apparently an idea loaded with problems. In Haiti, for example, fictional works tell of how women who speak out are raped, tortured, and killed for their actions. Death is not gender specific, however. Anyone could have been killed for speaking out during the Duvalier regime and the control of the Tonton Macoutes.[18] The problem remains, however, of the ability to speak out for the self when one is marginalised by poverty. Employment and unemployment or economic (in)dependence is a major factor in the ability of women similar to M'man Tine and Reine Sans Nom to speak for themselves in the Western sense. This 'Western sense' is used to imply an obvious confrontation with authority. If this overt insistence on self-expression is not seen by a person from the outside, then it is assumed that the individuals involved are silent, because, as stated above, they speak in code and also because the poor are less audible in many societies. That is to say simply, that a reading that determines Caribbean silence is a reading done with eyes which refuse to see the nuances present in the various strategies of cultural and personal resistance. Making a living is, therefore, of great importance in this situation as the workers must be able to eat. Most of the employment offered French Caribbean women of the working classes at one time or another was limited to the canefields. The fact that so much of their work, for those who work in the canefields for example, is controlled by a larger external force is significant in the understanding of how much autonomy they had. Banana farming was a great improvement over the torture of the old plantation as it is far less intrusive and no where near as hostile as sugar production is. Banana farming is, however, still controlled by forces external to the country and far beyond the control of the workers. It did, while it lasted, provide a certain amount of autonomy and stability for the labourers in the region.[19] The removal of banana farming left many in worse economic positions than they were in before. A labourer such as M'man Tine, for example, would be drastically restricted in terms of autonomy. Without being able to make a living outside the canefields, she must return to their hostile enclosure. She becomes once again trapped in a circumscribed existence seemingly without a way out. For these reasons, perhaps it is less dehumanising to opt for an alternative

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[18] For more information on the problems in Haiti and the ability to speak out see for example: James Ridgeway, ed., *The Haiti Files: Decoding the Crisis* (Washington DC, Essential Books, 1994); Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995); J. Michael Dash, *Haiti and the Untied States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination*, 2nd edn, (Houndmills, Mcamillain, 1997).

[19] The idea of autonomy is particularly salient in the wake of Chiquita Banana's great defeat and devastation--one can read, decimation--of the region. See: 'Yes, We Have no Bananas: Chiquita VS. The Caribbean: Island Economies May Be New Victims of Free Trade'. in *News Week* 28 April 1997.

lifestyle, still limited by poverty, but beyond the sphere of hostile labour. 'Alternative' is merely used to signal behaviour that does not fit the norm. So, for example, if Télumée were to become a self-reliant farmer with minimal connection to the city, she would have chosen an alternative lifestyle.

Intertextual Alliances/Interisland Links: Sugar's Legacy of Violence

The rhythm of M'man Tine and Reine Sans Nom and their resistance stretches to Haiti, where it is met by a welcoming drum that ironically fragments it, but continues to beat as it flows across the island and beyond. Grandmothers within this delimited space are vehicles for the transmission of indigenous knowledge. They are repositories of vital information. They tell their offspring where they were and teach them how they can move on without losing what they are, were, and will be. Keith Q. Warner describes this grounding function of grandmothers in the introduction to Zobel's *Black Shack Alley*; they are the ones responsible for teaching the offspring about the past:

> Zobel's impact in this novel can best be summed up by referring to the old saying that we can best know where we are going once we know where we have been. Zobel helps us see more clearly where we have been. In this respect, the novel takes its place alongside many of the fine autobiographical works that made their mark on the West Indian literary landscape.[20]

M'man Tine is in charge of disseminating the information that Warner refers to above. She teaches José about his past and thereby gives him the tools to move on, understanding more about himself than he would have, had she not been a voice in his life.

Sugarcane production is often at the centre of West Indian reality, no matter which language is spoken.[21] While the grandmothers' resistance to assimilation is expressed by the protection of the family plot or garden, the landscape offered as a backdrop in the texts discussed here is the hostile world of the sugarcane fields. Therefore, it is appropriate for this chapter to use sugar as an axis on which to rest the analysis of Zobel's *La Rue Cases-Nègres* and Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent*

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20 Keith Warner, 'Introduction' *Black Shack Alley* (London, Heinemann, 1980), p. viii.

21 For background see: Eugenio Fernandez Méndez, *Crónicas de las poblaciones negras en el Caribe Francés* (San Juan, Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, 1996).

sur Télumée Miracle. The cane is the force of life and death as it subsumes individuality and consumes life. At times in the texts, the cane renders its workers impotent, while simultaneously forcing women into subversive resistance to external exploitation. Sugar production automatically establishes the binary rhythm that Eurocentric discourse attempts to uphold by 'Othering' the Caribbean worker as it claims the centre for itself, even if it's superiority is only achieved by contrast to the 'Other'. Life must revolve around the cane as the workers have no other choice but to become slaves for its cultivation. The harsh nature of sugarcane farming becomes obvious in Benítez-Rojo's discussion:

> And sugar calls up the binary rhythm of law and work, of patriarchal hierarchy, of scientific knowledge, of punishment and discipline, of superego and castration, [. . .] the space of production and productivity, of rule and measure, of ideology and nationalism, of computer that speaks and separates; it is, above all, the signifier that offers itself as center, as origin, as fixed destination, for that which signifies the Other.[22]

Sugarcane, as Benítez-Rojo and Fernando Ortiz emphasise, becomes the centre, the axis, both the point of initiation and of departure for the slave community. It also becomes hostile turf for many women, post-slavery and post-emancipation, as it exposes them to exploitation; economic and sexual.[23] The following poem while elucidating the positioning of individuals within the cane also articulates the repetition of this rhythm across the region. Nicolás Guillén describes the pernicious nature of sugarcane in 'Caña':

> El negro
> junto al cañaveral.
> El yanqui
> sobre el cañaveral
> La tierra
> bajo el cañaveral
> Sangre
> *que se nos va!*[24]

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[22] Ibid. p. 172.

[23] See: Klein (1986); Mintz (1996); Momsen (1993); Momsen (1996); Rosamunde A. Renard, 'Labour Relations in Pot-Slavery Martinique and Guadeloupe 1848-1870', in *Caribbean Freedom* op. cit., pp. 80-92; Nigel Bolland, 'Systems of Domination After slavery: The Control of Land and Labour in the British West Indies', in *Caribbean Freedom* op. cit., pp. 107-123.

[24] Nicolás Guillén, *Summa Poetica* (Madrid, Ediciones Cátedra, 1990). p.84.

Where Guillén writes *'yanqui'* one could insert French, English, Spanish or simply 'coloniser'. The implications are painfully clear. Negro can signify *nègre* or negro as a sign for any of the characters under or subsumed into the *canne*. The poem illustrates how M'man Tine and Reine Sans Nom are locked into a position that drains them of life. These characters gain nothing but a miserly wage from toiling for an external company's prosperity.

Janis Palmas states that *'Las mujeres en la caña sufren de una invisibilidad plurivalente'*.[25] In this context, all that is visible is the sugar produced from the work these women slave at. They have, once again, become the talking mule and chattel slave which is silenced by the inhumanity of the situation they must live. The only difference between this reality and that experienced during slavery in the region, is that the women, as do the other workers, receive a wage for their torture. An example of the pernicious nature of the cane, its inextricable inclusion into Caribbean society, and the hostility of its blades, but its natural timeless, ageless survival, its *tan fe tan, tan lese tan*, can be seen in Danticat's novel. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, is written almost four decades after Zobel's novel and approximately three decades after Simone Schwarz-Bart's work, itself illustrates that the cane as a hostile entity in the lives of the women characters and the women on whose lives they are based has not been eradicated. They provide the blood that feeds the cane. The cane remains a constant, and therefore, timeless enemy, but it is simultaneously their main source of income. At her mother's funeral in Haiti, Sophie tells the reader:

> I ran through the field, attacking the cane. I took off my shoes and began to beat a cane stalk. [. . .] From where she was standing, my grandmother shouted like the women from the market place, "*Ou libéré?*" Are you free? Tante Atie echoed her cry, her voice quivering with her sobs. "*Ou libéré!*" [. . .] My grandmother walked over and put her hand on my shoulder. "Listen. Listen before it passes. *Paròl gin pié zèl*".[26]

The canefield here is the scene of inhuman labour conditions as well as the scene of rape. It establishes a parallel which elucidates Palmas's statement that the women within the cane are suffering from an *invisibilidad plurivalente*. The cane is embedded in their lives. Its violence pervades a certain level of society. To free oneself of the cane and its dehumanising exploitation, the characters must first confront it. It is the silent enemy in their midst.

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[25] Janis Palmas (1997), op. cit., p. 105.

[26] Edwidge Danticat (1994), op. cit., pp. 233-234.

Danticat indisputably places the torture and exploitation lived by so many in Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique in the middle of the cane. They live surrounded by the cane which signifies that they live surrounded by exploitation. These women cannot escape its hostility as it acts as an impenetrable barrier between them and the outside world. The only way out is through death or perhaps exile. Sophie attacks the cane in a fight to liberate herself from it. She is bound to the cane and the hostility and guilt it breeds in her life, because the fields are the place of her conception. They are also the site of her mother's rape and consequent decline, which leads to this moment. Her mother's suicide is a direct result of the years of suffering from the trauma of the rape she experienced at the hands of the Macoute. She must also face the fact of her rape daily, as she lives with Sophie, who embodies a constant reminder of it. Her second pregnancy reawakens in her the horror of her first sexual encounter, which has remained indelibly inscribed on her psyche. Sophie's act is important to the life of the women in all of these communities examined.

Once the woman insists on her voice rising above the blades, she is no longer invisible to the abuser, master, as seen in Chapter One. She suddenly becomes human. Until this moment, she has been effaced by the inhumanity of her surroundings—the sugarcane fields. M'man Tine is most certainly effaced by, and subsumed in, the fields of sharp blades, as it is those blades that cut and rip her and the other labourers on the *habitation*. Ironically, even within the close proximity to the cane and their relationship with it, sugar is such a precious commodity that M'man Tine keeps it in a jar, well hidden from José. This fact alone is illustrative of the tenuous, faceless existence which these people have in the body of the cane. Inversely, however, it is significant '*comment la colonisation travaille à déciviliser le colonisateur*'.[27] Colonisation, and the marginlisation which it represents for the subject, is deeply involved in the struggle that these grandmothers go through to extricate themselves and their offspring from erasure. The grandmothers' efforts are the mixture between perpetuating tradition, but also deconstructing the same tradition that holds them prisoner in the cane fields. While their presence and the role they play in the lives of their offspring have become timeless, so has their struggle to circumvent marginalisation.

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[27] Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Paris, Présence Africaine, 1955), p. 11.

From '*¡Que Siga La Tradición!'*[28] to *tan fe tan tan lese tan*, the rhythm flows. The juxtaposing of timelessness and the continuation of traditions is a double articulation of Télumée's words, but it also fragments—again, as in the previous chapter, at the very point of crossing and commonality. As Télumée embodies a continuity with the past, she also personifies a rupture with that same past. This is perhaps more pointedly illustrated in Zobel's novel with José, who, as a male, can more easily break a tradition of subjugation. However, as a male growing up with his female ancestor, *sans père,* he has been given her voice. It is with M'man Tine's voice that José can begin to articulate his life. She has given him a story, herstory, that allows him to understand himself and his world. It is through his contact with M'man Tine that José develops as a person, develops a conscience, a voice; he is empowered by this grandmother.[29] Without her *connaissance*, her offspring would be voiceless and unaware of their individual identities. Beverly Ormerod maintains, however, that there is an ambiguous relationship between José and M'man Tine, that José at times resents her and her treatment of him, and therefore the character's description of the grandmother is less fully developed and/or less holistic than Schwarz-Bart's characterisation.[30] The reader can conclude that the grandmother's relationship with the male grandchild is significantly distinct from her relationship with her granddaughter.[31] In the instances herein explored in the novels, the grandmother becomes the centre of the grandchild's life. She also becomes the teacher who gives her offspring the tools with which to construct their own discourse. The established centre of Euro-American control would in this way be decentered, as women like Reine Sans Nom and M'man Tine become the central players in the formation of counterdiscourse.[32] These characters perpetuate a tradition of resistance and a decentering, decolonising, describing of the mind of their

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[28] Gloria Estefan 'Que Siga la Tradición' *Mi Tierra* (1993 Sony Music Entertainment. New York).

[29] This is similar to Antón in Medina's *The Marks of Birth.*

[30] Beverly Ormerod, 'The Representation of Women in French Caribbean Fiction', in *An Introduction to Caribbean Francophone Writing* ed. by Sam Haigh, (1999).

[31] See: Ormerod (1999); Beverly Ormerod, 'The Boat and the Tree: Simone Schwarz-Bart's *The Bridge of Beyond'*, in *An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel* (London, Heinemann, 1985); 'L'Aieule: Figure dominante chez Simone Schwarz-Bart', in *Presence Francophone.* No 20 (1980): 95-106.

[32] See: Glissant (1989), for what Glissant also refers to as a counter poetics. See also: Celia M. Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance* (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1999).

descendants.[33] Télumée mirrors the sentiment of Estefan's song *¡Qué siga la tradición!'* as she continues the traditions of her female line, even if they are altered to ensure that she can speak for herself from within her garden. She claims:

> Soleil levé, soleil couché, les journées glissent et le sable que soulève la brise enlisera ma barque, mais je mourrai là, comme je suis, debout, dans mon petit jardin, quelle joie!...[34]

Silence is impossible. These women would rather die than remain silent. Danticat's narrator in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* also expresses the implicit danger of silence.[35] A similar re-inscription to that evidenced between the women in Danticat's work occurs with Reine Sans Nom and M'man Tine when they share themselves with Télumée and José, by sharing their memories. By speaking, they create an activism that disallows the same type of marginalisation from happening to these children. Danticat avows the importance of sharing stories, experiences, and even nightmares, as it may change the present and, in so doing, create a new future:[36]

> These women, they are [. . .] the faces that loom over you and recreate the same unspeakable acts that they themselves lived through. There is always a place where nightmares are passed on through generations like heirlooms.[37]

Perhaps the same nightmares can be passed on, but only until they can be worked out and resolved by future generations. It is possible that through exploring an identity linked to the ancestors, to the female kin, the same tragedies may be avoided or revisited, as in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, to achieve a resolution and end to a cycle. Memory would then serve to re-centre the offspring's identity. In 'Memory and Identity' John R. Gillis demonstrates the importance of memory:

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[33] See: Ngugi Wa Thiong' O, *Decolonsing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London, James Cirrey, 1986); *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (London, James Currey, 1993).

[34] Schwartz-Bart (1972), op. cit., p. 255.

[35] See also: Danticat (1995), op. cit., pp. 219-224.

[36] See: Minh-ha (1989); Anzaldúa (1990).

[37] Danticat (1994), op. cit., p. 234

> The core of any individual or group, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering, and what is remembered is defined by assumed identity. . . .[38]

The need to maintain a link with the past, in spite of the hardships caused, despite the tortures experienced, is clearly evidenced in Télumée and Reine Sans Nom. Even though the grandmother can no longer work in the fields, she does not move away. Perhaps memory is planted in the place where she lives. She, like M' Man Tine, lives simply and gets great pleasure from it. The violence has been removed from her life and slowly, very slowly, she begins the journey back to her origin.[39] This is the same peace that Télumée radiates at the end of the novel. Télumée says of Reine Sans Nom that:

> Son temps d'ancienne était venu, le cours de sa vie avait baissé; c'était maintenant une eau maigre qui s'écoulait lentement entre les pierres, en un petit mouvement quotidien, quelques gestes pour quelques sous. Elle avait son jardin, son porc, ses lapins et ses poules, elle cuisait des galettes de manioc sur une platine, des gâteaux aux cocos, faisait des sucre d'orge, cristallisait des patates douces, des surelles et des fruit-défendus qu'elle remettait tous les matins au père Abel, dont la boutique était contiguë à notre case.[40]

Articulated here is Walker's theme of the kitchen/garden as the black woman's only allowed and procured space. The narrator uses this as an extension to focus on the repetition of the past into the present. The garden becomes the locus of memory and re-living the past. Not only does the narrator illustrate that age has taken its toll on Reine Sans Nom, but she signals an earthiness in her life that is natural, a normal progression to old age. Reine Sans Nom takes her place as an elder in the world and must be treated, like Ma Cia, with deference. They are similar to gourds of knowledge as they hold the past and the keys to decode the **talk** that cannot be 'heard' by the white man even though it is uttered in front of him.[41] Perhaps this coding signals an occlusion between these characters of their real purposes. This real purpose is to resist the externally imposed oppression. They speak in codes so that their resistance is not uncovered by the master or *béké*. This collusion between

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[38] John R. Gillis, 'Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship', in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* ed. by John R. Gillis, (Princeton, Princeton UP, 1994), p. 3.

[39] Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., p.49.

[40] Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., pp. 49-50.

[41] See: Bush (1994); and Boyce Davies (1994).

women folk signals a transculturation between all the grandmothers conjured within these texts. As illustrated in Danticat's novels, the Haitian women must also code their discourse, so that they are not victimised for speaking out. The transculturation lies then in the links between women's collusive discourse from Martinique and Guadeloupe to Haiti. Therefore, the collusion appears boundless; it manifests on many levels, as Télumée also works together with her grandmother on the physical level to make life less burdensome for the older woman.

> Je l'aidais comme je pouvais, allais chercher de l'eau, courais après le porc, les poules, courais après les crabes de terre à carapace velue; si délectables au gros sel, courais après les mauvaises herbes en compagnie des «ti bandes», dans les champs de canne de l'Usine, courais avec ma petite charge d'engrais, courais, sans cesse, avec quelque chose sur la tête.[42]

Télumée enunciates her attempts to alleviate her grandmother's hardships by doing all that she can to help. The two woman work and struggle together to survive. They struggle to live in the face of adversity, creating an alternative reality for themselves. These two women merge to become one because they know that alone they cannot 'make do'. The women are connected, as Danticat observes, and they carry on that link, the(ir) past, 'like the hair on their head'.[43]

In those 'hairs on their head', the repeating island of memory and its construction of identity are evidenced. The grandmother embodies memories that will be passed on through her teaching. Therefore, as she repeats across time and space so do the memories she holds within her. By redirecting the Caribbean gaze from the 'outside looking in' to an insider describing what is seen and what is lived, a liberation of the characters occurs. This counters the gaze from without that automatically imbricates the Caribbean grandmother in a world of desire and opposition to the construct of the virtuous European woman of the Victorian age.[44] By so doing, the myth of the *doudou* is effectively subverted as these West Indian writers elucidate a different Caribbean reality.[45]

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42 Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., p. 50.

43 Danticat (1994), op. cit., p 234.

44 See: chapter one; Toni Morrion *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York, Vintage, 1992).

45 See: Toni Morrison, 'The Site of Memory', in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*. op. cit. pp.299-305.

Escaping the Enclosure: Proposing Something Different

But the damaging stereotypes and the need to survive keep many under bondage. This is the reality that places women and men in the canefields for life, particularly after emancipation.[46] The reader is given a glance into the garden and kitchen of this woman whom life had removed from the canefields, away from slave labour and allowed into a delimited, world of her own agency:

> J'aurais tant voulu la soulager de son jardin, de ses kilibibis et fruits cristallisés, de ses pauvre sucre d'orge à un sou et la mettre dans sa berceuse, comme il convenait à son âge, à boire de ses amples narines les senteurs qui avaient roulé jusqu'au seuil de sa case. C'était ça même, ça même qui devait attendre une vieille maman bourrique noire, qui avait tant sué et trimé sur terre.[47]

Perhaps Schwarz-Bart enunciates the term *'bourique'*, she-ass, in realisation that this is the treatment of women in the region. One can argue, therefore, that, as a West Indian woman writer, she explodes the meaning so that 'she-ass' is no longer denigrative. Instead, the term is used to elucidate their experiences in a hostile environment. The writer articulates the life imposed on this woman, and others like her, by the slave master and the *béké* after emancipation.[48] But the 'she-ass' image lives on in the eyes of many colonisers. Although Caribbean writers work to deconstruct the images of the sexy mulatta, western imaginings or imagings still insist on superimposing it on to the Caribbean. The former and the latter in their struggle, one to 'Other' the subject and the other to re-affirm a positive presence, struggle with each other[49] Reine Sans Nom fits the stereotypical hard-working matriarch that is so difficult to get away from, as it is through necessity that she must work so hard. She, at an earlier point in her life, could have been positioned in the place of the exotic mulatta, but, because of age, she is now limited to the role of the matriarch.

Similarly, while Reine Sans Nom works herself to exhaustion, Télumée is placed in the role of the scarlet woman. When she begins work for the *béké*, she is

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46 See: Klein (1986); Momsen (1996); Scarano (1989).

47 Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., pp. 85-86.

48 See: chapter one for the discussion on women and the work they had to do done in order to survive.

49 Huguette Dagenais, 'Women in Guadeloupe: The Pardoxes of Reality', in *Women and Change in the Caribbean* ed. by Janet Momsen. (Kingston, Ian Randle, 1993), p. 83.

objectified, much along the lines of earlier descriptions of black women. Huguette Dagenais argues that, 'In the North American imagination, Caribbean islands are associated with sunny holidays, sensuality (the three 'S'—sea, sex and sun—in whatever order one places them)'.[50] She goes on to argue against the representation of French Caribbean women as sexual objects or matriarchs that she sees as a trend in writing from the region. She feels that Guadeloupe is one of the least studied and therefore least understood parts of the region and should not be oversimplified by stereotypes. Dagenais here argues along similar lines as does Joan Dayan. This goes in tandem with Bush's observations on stereotype formation where she sees black women as being caught in the role of domineering matriarch, passive workhorse, and/or scarlet woman, because of biased cultural views. 'Through [a] lack of precise analysis, ambivalent images of Caribbean women have emerged',[51] thus minimalising these women.

Schwarz-Bart presents the sensualising and sexualising of the Caribbean woman, when she positions Télumée in the *béké's* house. When Télumée finds employment with a rich family, the master of the house expects her to allow him sexual freedom in return for a dress. He assumes that Télumée will welcome him into her bed.[52] She is portrayed as the sexualised black woman, object of all colonial desires and hatred. The white master's position of power allows him to lord over the women in his (or his wife's) employment.

Colour politics and desire are not as black and white as they at first appear in these texts. In Zobel's novel, the mulatto overseer has a child with an octoroon who becomes his mistress. However, he does not marry her, but keeps her as his personal concubine. She finally asserts her own agency after he marries a mulatta, and leaves him and her son, whom he has taken to live with him, in order to live her own life. She will from then on be seen as the scarlet woman. This woman, like Télumée, has been positioned in a hostile world where she is denied agency, but she disengages herself from that world and moves into her own sphere. She is, therefore, no longer object.[53] She is not silent. Her voice may remain inarticulate to the *béké's* ears, but her actions speak louder than her words. Through extension then, Télumée

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50 Dagenais (1993), op. cit., p. 83.

51 Ibid.

52 See: Bush (1990); Walker (1981); Hill Collins (1990).

53 See: Boyce Davies (1994), op. cit. pp. 137-141, for a discussion on the marking of the woman's body through childbirth as a sign of ownership.

is not silent. She works until she has accomplished what she has intended, and then leaves. She has learnt from her grandmother that she must 'ride the horse', take control over her own life, and this she does. The act of establishing her freedom from her oppressive employers, by asserting that she will no longer work for them, allows her a voice. This supposes that women, particularly Télumée and Reine Sans Nom, are able to speak for themselves and also want to do so. They are not given agency. They rather assume this agency subversively.[54]

Storytelling and Subversion

Storytelling is one such subversive act, as mentioned in Chapter One. Their storytelling reaches beyond an illusion of action and becomes an act of subversion.[55] Their stories embody survival tactics. When Reine Sans Nom tells Télumée 'the story of the Man Who Tried to Live on Air',[56] she teaches her to remain in control of her life, no matter what happens:

> ma petite braise, [. . .] si tu enfourches un cheval, garde ses brides bien en main, afin qu'il ne te conduise pas. [. . .] derrière une peine il y a une autre peine, la misère est une vague sans fin, mais le cheval ne doit pas te conduire, c'est toi qui dois conduire le cheval.[57]

This story is a lesson in survival. And as the *Créole* saying goes, *'Si-m di ou, oua konn passé-m'*,[58] which means that this information and these survival skills are reserved for kin. The storytelling and past-sharing between Reine Sans Nom and Télumée, when viewed from without, may be perceived as a waste of time under colonial control or a means for skirting the issues while deferring to colonial powers. However, this is far from the truth. Télumée's act of growing a garden is subversion,

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[54] See: Glissant (1989).

[55] Ibid. p. 133.

[56] Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., p. 48.

[57] Ibid. p. 82.

[58] See: Chancey (1997); Stephanie Ovide, *Creole: Creole-English/English-Creole (Caribbean)* (New York, Hippocrene, 1996); Interviews; (If I tell you, you will know more than I do.)

which she learns from her grandmother.[59] Because of their creole nature and the fact that their gardens are sites of resistance to marginalisation, Reine Sans Nom and Télumée's activities are not copied from their invaders. The façade of passive acceptance is actually a great deal more; it is an act of self-affirmation. Self-affirmation through daily chores is a part of life necessary for self-definition. These women **talk** stories of resistance.[60] Minh-ha argues that stories have many purposes, which all lead back to knowing the past.

> Refresh, regenerate, or purify. Telling stories and watering morning glories both function to the same effect. For years and years she has been renewing her forces with regularity to keep them intact. Such ritual ablutions--the telling and retelling--allow her to recall the incidents that occurred before she was born with as much certainty as if she had witnessed them herself. The words passed down from mouth to ear (one sexual part to another sexual part), womb to womb, body to body are the remembered ones.[61]

Télumée, José, Reine Sans Nom, M'man Tine, and Medouze's stories enable this 'refreshing' to happen. The elders are the scrolls on which history is engraved. By handing down their stories, they allow for their continuation, as Danticat observes. Télumée and Reine Sans Nom's storytelling and gardening are acts that renew their forces. The only complications arise when that link from woman to woman is broken for some reason. In this case, the link ends at Télumée. The reader is not certain if Sonore, her adopted daughter, will ever return, but Télumée does not need her to return. Télumée has effectively become the grandmother of the community. She becomes the healer of the people, not just her own bloodline. Reine Sans Nom and Ma Cia have reached a powerful point of confluence in Télumée. The speaker subverts and circumvents colonial, patriarchal authority rather than remaining silent and further playing up the stereotypes of the black female. 'The story' is all that Reine Sans Nom and M'man Tine have to give to their grandchildren, but storytelling is a weapon sufficient for any battle. As Minh-ha elaborates:

> Let me tell you a story. For all I have is a story. Story passed on from generation to generation, named joy. Told for the joy it gives the storyteller and the listener. Joy inherent in the process of storytelling. Whoever understands it also understands that a story, as distressing

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[59] See: Walker (1983).

[60] See: Boyce Davies (1994); bell hooks (1990); and also chapter one of this thesis.

[61] Minh-ha (1989), op. cit., p. 136.

> as it can be in its joy, never takes anything away from anybody. Its name is Joy.[62]

This story that passes from generation to generation coincides with spiritual healing. The link between these women continues to carry traditions, strength, and spiritual knowledge. The underlying beat signals a submerged unity or cohesion that cannot be severed, even through violence. They are women who carry their ancestors with them. They have magic in their hearts. This magic is given out through their grandmothers. 'Woman and magic. Her power resides in her belly—Our Mother's belly—for her cure is not an isolated act but a total social phenomenon'.[63]

Grand/Mother-Power: Spiritual Healing and Bridging

Reine Sans Nom and Télumée have the solidarity and confluence between themselves in favour of which Danticat argues:

> The women in your family have never lost touch with one another. Death is a path we take to meet on the other side. What goddesses have joined, let no one cast asunder. With every step you take, there is an army of women watching over you. We are never any farther than the sweat on our brows or the dust on your toes. Though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, fear no evil for we are always with you.[64]

Reine Sans Nom's words articulate the same feeling. A grandmother or granddaughter is not alone in life. She has all of her ancestors with her to aid her move through the difficult times as well as the good times. In 'The Shaman Woman, Resistance and the Power of Transformation', Brinda Mehta points out that Ma Cia 'construct[s] that particular bridge in the psyche of the female characters'.[65] This thesis maintains, moreover, that Reine Sans Nom intersects with Ma Cia to form this bridge and to allow female characters to 'experience the full import of her shamanic

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[62] Ibid. p. 119.

[63] Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989), op. cit., p. 136.

[64] Danticat (1994), op. cit., pp. 222-223.

[65] Brinda Mehta 'The Shaman Woman, Resistance, and the Power of Transformation: A Tribute to Ma Cia in Simone Schwarz-Bart's *The Bridge of Beyond*', in *Sacred Possessions* ed. by Margarite Fernandez Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 1997, pp. 231-247), p. 236.

capacities, enabling them to achieve epic levels of self-representation'.[66] This collusion cannot even be 'put asunder' by death. Reine Sans Nom responds to Télumée's accusation that she is looking forward to the separation that will come through death by saying:

> —Ce n'est pas ma mort qui me réjouit tant, dit-elle, mais ce qui la suivra... le temps où nous ne nous quitterons plus, mon petit verre en cristal... peux-tu imaginer notre vie, moi te suivant partout, invisible, sans que les gens se doutent jamais qu'ils ont affaire à deux femmes et non pas à une seule?... peux-tu imaginer cela?[67]

The unity between these women gives them strength. Their binding becomes an effective pooling of their ancestral powers. The mystical union of Télumée and Reine Sans Nom creates a resistance that can overcome any oppression.

The collusion between Reine Sans Nom and her granddaughter, like the spiritual connection between Danticat's female characters and their ancestors, implies a strength that is inherent within the group through their unity.[68] Therefore, neither power does reside outside the individual, nor will it be found by venturing into exile. The power being sought after lies in the home space, in the relationship between the past and the present, in the connection between grandmother and grandchild. By remaining at home and connecting with the past, and with the ancestors, these women do not need to look outside for strength to survive.

In these texts in particular, the grandmother embodies the art of healing. Télumée describes her grandmother's magic; her seeing and her wisdom. She illustrates how she gets it from the source, *l'informatrice*, so that she, Télumée, can write/tell it as the word scratcher/*marqueur de paroles*,[69] and passes on all her knowledge. She works, along with Ma Cia, at transferring their gifts of seeing and healing, of being able to cleanse and purify. In one of Télumée's moments of grief, Reine Sans Nom and Ma Cia come to the rescue:

> Hier je suis montée voir man Cia dans les bois, elle m'a dit qu' un mauvais esprit avait été envoyé contre ta case, pour y mettre la désolation. [. . .] Man Cia te fait dire qu'elle ne dort pas dans ses bois

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66 Mehta (1997), op. cit., p. 236.

67 Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., p. 179.

68 See also: Carole Boyce Davies (1994).

69 See: Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco*. (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1992).

> [. . .] La première chose, c'est de désenchanter la case où tu te trouves, pour que l'esprit n'ait aucune prise sur toi. [. . .] Le lendemain à la première heure, grand-mère se munit de récipients de coco et les disposant autour de ma case, y fit brûler de l'encens, du benjoin, des racines de vétiver et des feuilles magiques qui produisaient une belle fumée verte, lente à se dissiper dans l'air, et qui entoura bientôt ma case d'un halo protecteur.[70]

Although Grandmother has magic, Ma Cia has a more developed magic than hers,[71] but both work together to obtain the results they want: healing and protection. These women are the famed ancestors of the community. There is a striking parallel in the relationships between Felicia and Marina, the Seer, in Pablo Medina's *The Marks of Birth*, and also Flor Fernández Barrios's grandmothers and Reine Sans Nom and Ma Cia in Schwarz-Bart's work.[72] Both these relationships hinge on an occlusion of what binds the women together. The six women are all healers in their own way and have developed friendships that seem to continue into the other world. They all carry their ancestors with them wherever they go. Simply by living, they teach their communities to live and die. Brinda Mehta sees them as shamans that hold an important place in their societies. This is important in the Caribbean context in terms of individual and communal empowerment:

> Shamans occupy a central position in Caribbean and other traditional non-Western cultures, serving as valuable storehouses of myth, folklore, socio-cultural values and practices, and the healing arts. Constituting the fabric of cohesion and self-consciousness, especially in rural communities, shamans have been posited as persons of distinction with exemplary powers of (self-)mastery.[73]

Ma Cia is the most powerful character presented in the novel:

> In *Pluie et vent* the most powerful figure is Ma Cia, the sorceress, who can read and interpret the signs of the spirit world as well as those of nature and the human body. Unlike Papa Logbo, who keeps his knowledge a secret from Zetou, Ma Cia initiates Télumée into the "secrets of plants" and teaches her "the human body, its centres, its weaknesses". She learns "how to set people and animals free, how to break spells and turn sorcery back on the sorcerers" (130)—in other

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[70] Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., pp. 161-162.

[71] See: Mehta (1997); See also: Minh-Ha (1989).

[72] See: Medina (1994); Fernández Barrios (1999).

[73] Mehta (1997), op. cit., p. 231.

> words, she learns how to read and interpret (sorcery, spells) and write (to send the spells back).[74]

This spirituality and sharing are deeply significant as it is the only way the community can continue. It is through the access provided by Reine Sans Nom that Télumée becomes the reader and writer that Romero-Cesareo claims her to be. Setting themselves free is extremely important as these women liberate with their knowledge rather than using it to control their communities as the *békés* do. The balance between the women is intricately maintained and even Ma Cia, in her seemingly infinite wisdom and position of power, acknowledges Reine Sans Nom. They have a relationship of mutual respect, cooperation, and healing that binds them together.[75] Ma Cia's respect for Reine Sans Nom is expressed at the latter's death:

> —Je frappe ma poitrine devant Reine Sans Nom et je dis: il y en a dont la vie ne réjouit personne et il y en a dont la mort même apaise les humains... voici une belle pierre dans ton jardin, n'est-ce pas la Reine? acheva-t-elle en souriant à bonne-maman.[76]

This homage to the older woman and seer is also important as it not only demonstrates a solidarity within the community, but also a resistance to marginalisation, and a spirit of survival. There is a profound link that transcends the generations, space, and the barrier between the two worlds. The links within the community and the roles the women maintain throughout their lives are observed by Romero-Cesareo as rooted in social practice:

> In [. . .] *Pluie et vent* women go beyond images and words, metaphors and symbols. In *Pluie et vent* the grandmother, Reine Sans Nom [. . .], claims there is an "invisible thread" going from home to home keeping the community together; this symbol is rooted, however, in practices that nourish this sense of community and make the connection a reality (95).[77]

This thread is a metaphor for the link that exists, the bridge between the female elders and all the women in the community. The healing that must take place within the community is therefore facilitated through this link. Life is, however, not made

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[74] Romero-Cesareo, (1997), op. cit., p. 260.

[75] See: Terborg-Penn (1995).

[76] Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., p. 184.

[77] Romero-Cesareo (1997), op. cit., p. 259.

easy for any of these women even though they are shamans. Whenever they work their magic, they will be criticised as well as heralded. When Reine Sans Nom cleanses Télumée's shack, her efforts meet with great disapproval from the one they intended to help.[78] Elie's response is to condemn them as witches and to set out to beat Télumée every day. Where would Télumée be without the healing touch of Reine Sans Nom? Télumée discloses how her grandmother gives her the ability to move on rather than succumbing to Élie's abuse. At the beginning of the beatings, her grandmother comes to her:

> Sitôt qu'elle entendait le galop du cheval, grand-mère se précipitait vers ma case pour voir si rien n'était arrivé, et puis elle m'ondoyait les membres, massait, à l'occasion, les endroits où avaient porté les poings ou les pieds d'Élie, massait mon front, pour le cœur et l'espérance, et me versait sur les cheveux un petit bain d'herbes macérées destiné à me faire reprendre odeur et couleur aux yeux de mon homme. Grâce à elle je mangeais. [79]

Télumée's healing is complete when she returns to her grandmother's cabin and is cared for by her. In a last attempt to save her granddaughter *'Pour ne pas faiblir devant moi, Reine Sans Nom partait pour la première fois lancer son chagrin en pleine rue... mon enfant, mon enfant, sa tête est partie, partie...'*.[80] This is a final impetus to heal Télumée, and it works. By going to the street, Grandmother enlists the help of the community of women. Her cry is not only to those on the physical plane, but also to those on the spiritual. She transcends the boundary between the two worlds and so can conjure help from her ancestors. This finally 'relocates' Télumée's spirit, which has been sent wandering in the abyss between the two worlds:

> La Reine, la Reine, qui dit qu'il n'y a rien pour moi sur la terre, qui dit pareille bêtise?... en ce moment même j'ai lâché mon chagrin au fond de la rivière et il est en train de descendre le courant, il enveloppera un autre cœur que le mien... parle-moi de la vie, grand-mère, parle-moi de ça...[81]

Télumée is finally ready to re-establish the links by listening to her grandmother's storytelling once again: *parle-moi de la vie, grand-mère'*. By uniting these women to

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[78] Cleansing is used in the spiritual sense.

[79] Schwarz-Bart. (1972), op. cit., p. 159.

[80] Ibid. p. 171.

[81] Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., p. 172.

help cure her granddaughter, Reine Sans Nom helps to heal the community as a whole. She draws them together exactly as evidenced in the Haitian canefields in Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. The community's confluence is also seen in Zobel's work when M'man Tine becomes ill and the women look after José.[82] A spiritual connection is maintained by these women elders. Romero-Cesareo also focuses on the impact the community has had on Télumée's healing, implicating them greatly in her return to reality, and she establishes the importance of the conflation of the two worlds, the spiritual and the natural:

> Here women are the mediators between gods and mortals, between Télumée's imaginary world and their own. They have no need for Legba, for they are the ones who stand at the crossroads, controlling the word and its utterance. They laugh, sing (hymns of deliverance!), invoke, provoke, and will Télumée back to life among them.[83]

Romero-Cesareo's observations underscore the matrilinearity/focality of the community. Furthermore, she points out that the natural continuation would be, as Mehta posits, the heading of the group by a shaman like Ma Cia or Reine Sans Nom. The act of coming together and the strength of the community, Télumée states, brought her back completely:

> Ce qui me remit pour de bon, ce furent toutes ces visites, toutes les attentions et les petits présent dont on m'honora lorsque ma tête revint d'où elle était partie. La folie est une maladie contagieuse, aussi ma guérison était celle de tous et ma victoire, la preuve que le nègre a sept fiels et ne désarme pas comme ça, à la première alerte [. . .] bien, bien femme, garde la position et ne va pas acheter une paire de ciseaux pour lui planter dans le cœur, car cet homme-là ne vaut pas une paire de ciseaux. Je riais, j'acquiesçais sans mot dire et toutes ces paroles, ces rires, ces marques d'attention contribuaient à me remettre en selle, à me faire tenir en main les brides de mon cheval.[84]

Significantly, all of this happens in the grandmother's space. A space, as Boyce Davies points out, which is a place where **'It's not everything you can talk, BUT. . .'**[85] A rhythm has then been beat out that allows for a sacred area, even

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[82] See: Hill Collins (1990), work on othermothers.

[83] Ivette Romero-Cesareo (1997), op. cit., p. 263.

[84] Schwarz-Bart, p. 173.

[85] See: Boyce Davies (1994), op. cit., p. 153.

within *l'espace dominé* where there is a female-centred space that allows for all **talk.**[86] It is the **talk** that heals. Ma Cia is deeply implicated in the healing process. As Romero-Cesareo points out, '[Télumée] also stresses the healing properties—for both body and soul—of the special baths prepared by Ma Cia, which help her recuperate from the string of tragic events in her life'.[87] Romero-Cesareo describes the process as:

> Télumée would always arrive at Ma Cia's yard to find "a big earthen pan waiting for [her] outside her cabin, in the sun, full of water dark with all kinds of magic leaves—paoca, calaba balsam, bride's rose, and the power of Satan" in which she would steep, ritualistically ladling the contents nine times over her head, to "leave behind all the fatigues of the week".[88]

The combination of the spiritual and the physical in the healing practices of these women is essential.[89] Thus, attempts to separate religion or spirituality from physical healing would be greatly frustrated by the reality that these processes are so intricately intertwined.[90] The healing and community spiritual connection continues throughout the novel. Before Reine Sans Nom's death, she tells her granddaughter that she now has her own life or Kumbla in which she carries her stories and her ancestors. Kumbla is significant in this context as it not only connotes a spiritual home, a hiding place for valuable information, but also a camouflage from the outside world. Its is also a container that is filled with invaluable knowledge. It therefore hides the existence of a deeper reality within, which is essential in this situation where the characters must always occlude their truer identities from a hostile patriarchal world. Reine Sans Nom has filled a calabash so that Télumée would take her place after her death. She has, however, not only filled it with happiness; she has put reality into it. Reine Sans Nom has ensured that her granddaughter has experienced life so that Télumée will be able to carry on after her death. Reine Sans Nom tells Télumée:

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[86] Ibid.

[87] Romero-Cesareo (1997), op. cit., p. 255.

[88] Romero-Cesareo, Ibid.

[89] See also: Joseph M. Murphy, *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora* (Boston, Beacon, 1994).

[90] See: Cristina García's character Celia's relationship with *Santería.*

> Télumée, la peine existe, et chacun doit en prendre un peu sur ses épaules... ah, maintenant que je t'ai vue souffrir, je peux tranquillement fermer mes deux yeux, car je te laisse avec ton panache sur la terre...[. . .] surtout ne va pas crier, car si tu le fais pour moi, que fera la mère qui reste après son enfant?... et puis ne va pas avoir peur d'un cadavre... ne va pas avoir peur...[91]

Télumée has learnt well from her grandmother's lessons. She moves through the traditions that allow the community to reunite and to heal after the death of an elder. She takes Reine Sans Nom's place, sharing a part of the ancestral knowledge that must be passed on from generation to generation. She must alert the village of her grandmother's death and then prepare for their arrival to mourn their loss:[92]

> [. . .] j'ai confectionné quelques torches, j'ai allumé les lampes et j'ai accueilli comme il fallait les gens qui commençaient d'affluer pour rendre hommage à Reine Sans Nom. On apportait des tasses, des verres, des marmites, du café grillé, des légumes pour le bouillon de l'aube, et chacun venait se recueillir et contempler le visage de grand-mère. Elle semblait endormie, un vague sourire flottait à ses lèvres [. . .][93]

This quote articulates two distinct modes of coming of age: the spiritual and the physical. Télumée learns from Reine Sans Nom, and, at the latter's death, Télumée moves to a higher level within the community; she also moves under the closer tutelage of Ma Cia. After Ma Cia's tutelage, she ascends into a position of status on both the physical and spiritual plane. These launchings culminate in Télumée's ascendance into the position of shaman.[94] Similarly, the quote illustrates the celebration at the closing of someone's physical life, an extremely important ritual in the Caribbean. As one life transcends the boundary between the physical and the spiritual, another one moves into a higher position in the physical sphere. In the following quotation, Télumée is sent off into the world to begin the journey into womanhood:

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91 Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., p. 180.

92 Further illustration of cultural retention and continuation perpetuated by the female elders. See: Minh-ha (1989); Glissant (1989).

93 Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., p. 181.

94 See: Murphy (1994), for discussion of similar rites in *Santería*.

> Quelques semaines plus tard, grand-mère me largua dans le ciel, tout légèrement, précautionneusement, comme un cerf-volant qu'on lâche, qu'on essaye, qu'on fait voler pour la première fois. Elle me donna sa bénédiction pour tout le soleil que j'avais fait entrer dans sa petite case. Puis me fictionnant d'un jus d'absinthe amère, de citronnelle et de patchouli, elle déclara:
>
> —Il arrive, même au flamboyant, d'arracher ses boyaux dans son ventre pour le remplir de paille...[95]

Even though her grandmother would love to keep her to herself and live with the joy her granddaughter brings her, she realises that she must indeed send her forth to become a full woman in the world, and thus the community. The former quote juxtaposed with this illustrates the journey or process of maturation, which the grandmother oversees. The younger woman must go through to become an elder and carry her ancestors like 'the hair on [her] head'.[96]

When Reine Sans Nom dies, Télumée moves to Ma Cia's shack in the forest. There is always a connection between the women. It is in Ma Cia's world that Télumée will continue her lessons for her journey in becoming an elder among her people. From Ma Cia, Télumée learns the secrets of spices and herbs that her grandmother begins to teach her. This student/teacher relationship is typical of a matrifocal or matrilinear-structured community.

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[95] Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., pp. 91-92.

[96] See: Danticat (1994), op. cit., p. 234.

Liberating Voices/Women Coming Together

Within the community, the women do all that they can to help each other. When Gloria Anzaldúa invokes the Mexican virgin, *La Llorona*, she speaks of a wailing that encodes their cry for liberation.[97] In the Caribbean this is not dissimilar, as seen in Danticat's work, to the cry: *Ou Libéré?* .[98] This cry is an affirmation of life. It is after experiencing enormous hardship and struggle that the women in Danticat's fiction find their voice, their link to their spiritual guides. It is only after these experiences, as Sophie's grandmother tells her, that she will know what to answer. Sophie's suffering can then be seen as a passage into another level of life, as exemplified by Schwarz-Bart's characters. This passage into womanhood is illustrated in Schwarz-Bart's novel by Télumée's struggle to survive in the wake of her husband's abuse. Before Télumée moves back to her grandmother's house, she hides herself away in her husband's shack. Ashamed of the abuse Élie has heaped on her, and sinking further into herself and the gaps between this and the other reality, she lies in her garden, as the world carries on around her, hoping to be erased by the over-growth of grass. The women in *Pluie et vent* illustrate their own version of the Haitian women's cry—*Ou libéré*—when they come together to wail and to heal.[99] Reine Sans Nom and Ma Cia facilitate this unity. They act as a binding rhythm that keeps the community together, as do the old women in Haiti. It is uncertain where this knowledge would end up without these elders. Without the wisdom that these two sages pass on to their offspring, these women would be markedly different. Perhaps they would give into their pain and die of the abuses heaped upon them. Télumée describes this process of rescuing a lost soul, of wailing, exhorting, and praying, which the women go through for her:

> Ainsi les gens allaient et venaient devant ma case et de temps en temps une femme s'échappait d'un groupe, levait au ciel des bras suppliants et modulait d'une voix aiguë... naissez, naissez pour changer nos destins... et l'entendant j'avais le sentiment étrange qu'elle me lançait un fil dans l'air,un fil très léger en direction de ma case, et il me venait alors un sourire.[100]

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97 See: Gloria Anzaldúa (1987).

98 Danticat (1994), op. cit., pp. 233-234.

99 Wailing has deeply spiritual implications in many non-Western rites.

100 Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., p. 165.

Télumée goes on to describe how the women bring her the news of her grandmother's illness and to try again to bring her back among the living through the evocation of another woman's suffering.[101] When the women come to Télumée, they mention among themselves that Reine Sans Nom is ill. This mention of Reine's ailment is to remind Télumée that she has other responsibilities on earth. Her grandmother is an important part of her life, and, as a part of the community, and as female kin, she has a role to play in healing Reine Sans Nom. She is therefore expected to think about the community of women rather than herself. The call for her to come to Reine Sans Nom's aid is not denying her own pain, simply that she must put it aside to help someone else who is in greater need. Also, as the continuation of the female line, she has a particular role to play in the perpetuation of the ancestral knowledge embodied in Reine Sans Nom, and she must therefore come out of her shadow so that this knowledge does not die with her. Furthermore, the profound love shared by the two women is expected to be sufficient to call Télumée back.

Not expressly articulated but palpably present in these words is the Creole saying '*Lespoua fe viv*'[102] 'hope makes one live'. Perhaps hope is all the female community has when life seems to put too many obstacles in their way.[103] Throughout the novel, the concept of hope is expressed in various ways in which the community holds together:

> —Savons-nous ce que nous charrions dans nos veines, nous les nègres de Guadeloupe?... la malédiction qu'il faut pour être maître, et celle qu'il faut pour être esclave... C'est vrai, tu as raison, Ismène, quelque chose empêche cette petite négresse de toucher terre, et elle peut continuer longtemps à naviguer comme ça, longtemps... Et pourtant moi Adriana je frappe ma poitrine et je vous dis: cette femme abordera. [. . .] Puis s'adressant directement à moi, depuis l'autre côté de la route, la bonne Adriana lança d'une voix vibrante, pareille à un cri: —Télumée, cher petit pays, reste bien dans tes herbes, tu n'as pas besoin de nous répondre aujourd'hui; mais une seule chose que je voulais te dire, en ce jour de Noël, tu aborderas.[104]

From the above interaction, it is evident that the community of women seem to stand and wait for their countrywoman who is in crisis to come back to them so that they

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101 See: Schwarz-Bart page 166

102 'hope makes live'; See: Chancey (1997), op. cit., p. 104.

103 See: Glissant (1989), for discussion of cultural codes and language.

104 Schwarz-Bart op. cit., pp. 167-168.

can help her back into life. They send their words out to call her back and affirm that she is one of them; they are united as one. As these women demonstrate that *'Parole gin pie—zel,*[105] 'that words have feet, wings', they send their words out to retrieve Télumée from wherever she has gone. Through telling their stories and creating their counterdiscourse, these women heal.[106] Their stories are a living poetics, imbibed with personal experience and survival skills which flow from Reine Sans Nom into the community. Their stories are dynamic tools of cultural resistance that will not congeal as long as they remain alive and constantly changing to meet the society's challenges. They are used to remind women that there is hope of survival in a hostile outer world. The other women within the community are in this way responsible for helping anyone suffering a sense of dislocation or alienation back to a sense of wholeness and community. The women cast out a rescuing thread with their *parole*.

Refashioning and Cross-currents: The grandmothers push for their offspring to succeed

The women interrelate the rhythms so that they cross and re-cross in their lives and become different yet similar; fragmented yet united. Their diverging at the crossroads is blurred so that Télumée exists in both worlds. She exists in the spiritual world that she, Reine Sans Nom, and Ma Cia make up in the novel, and within the community of Fond Zombi. However, her existence within the world as dictated by the mainstream patriarchal power is problematic.

Arguably, Télumée does become a full citizen in both realities as does Bennett's Granny B.[107] This is, however, a contentious issue, as it assumes that Télumée, like GB, is given a full and active role in the mainstream world run by the *béké*. One could argue that the only world in which these uneducated[108] black women truly get complete citizenship is the world that they inhabit. Elsewhere, they are initially faced with hostility and the threat of cultural loss, by the termed dominant culture, that would be found in a post-departmental state. Post-departmental is used to signal that the act of departmentalisation has already occurred. The

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105 (words have feet, wings,). Danticat (1994), op. cit., p. 234.

106 See: as Glissant (1989), terms it, their counter poetics.

107 See: Bennett, *God the Stonebreaker*

108 'Uneducated' is used to refer to higher schooling or colonial education which is not foregrounded in this novel.

citizens have already become incorporated into France and are attempting to move on from there, as is the case in Martinique and Guadeloupe. While the inhabitants are given some agency, the system denies belonger status to these women. This denial of full belonging is present particularly as the system is constructed in France and exported to its departments in the other sea.[109] Thus, this system is considered hostile to these women's full participation. Télumée and her community are left at the sidelines to fend for themselves, never assimilating fully.[110] Marginalisation, however, creates its own resistance. But for people generally, and for women particularly, there is a constant re-fashioning of the self in order to survive in a changing world. M'man Tine is faced by this problem of re-creating herself to keep pace with life, but she does this through divesting herself of self and investing it in her grandson, José.

Zobel and the *Canne de Sucre*

Although separated by two decades, Simone Schwarz-Bart and Zobel's novels demonstrate a repetition of a rhythm that is not time specific. Both authors articulate the destruction inherent in the canefields. As Fanta Toureh points out, *'Le deuxième esclavage est celui du champ de cannes. Il marque l'enfermement dans un travail pénible et monotone'*.[111] The importance of the canefields as backdrop for all action is evidenced at the outset of Zobel's novel:

> D'aussi loin que je voyais venir m'man Tine, ma grand-mère, au fond du large chemin qui convoyait les nègres dans les champs de canne de la plantation et les ramenait, je me précipitais à sa rencontre, en imitant le vol du mansfenil, le galop des ânes, et avec des cris de joie, entraînant toute la bande de mes petits camarades qui attendaient comme moi le retour de leurs parents.[112]

Without crops similar to cane or coffee, one could argue that slavery would not have existed in the same guise. When José describes the location of his home, the omnipresence of the cane is clearly illustrated:

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[109] See: Minh-ha (1989).

[110] See: hooks (1990); hooks (1989).

[111] Fanta Toureh, *L'Imaginaire dans l'œuvre de Simone Schwarz-Bart: Approche d'une Mythologie Antillaise* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1986), p. 131.

[112] Zobel (1957), op. cit., p. 9.

> La rue Cases-Nègres se compose d'environ trois douzaines de baraques en bois couvertes en tôle ondulée et alignées à intervalles réguliers, au flanc d'une colline. Au sommet, trône, coiffée de tuiles, la maison du géreur, dont la femme tient boutique. Entre «la maison» et la rue Cases, la maisonnette de l'économe, le parc à mulets, le dépôt d'engrais. Au-dessous de la rue Cases et tout autour, des champs de cannes, immenses, au bout desquels apparaît l'usine.[113]

Reading beyond Zobel's observations of life in the canefields, one can maintain that M'man Tine and Reine Sans Nom are exposed to trying labour practices that erase any individuality in favour of a collective productivity, as observed at the beginning of this chapter. As Benítez-Rojo posits, cane is all about productivity, violence, and even erasure, and this is evidenced in all the texts. M'man Tine is the cane worker who is effectively subsumed into the canefields. She thus becomes Hurston's talking mule. Hurston condemns the system in which, she argues, Caribbean women are nothing more than bodies which do hard labour, like mules who can speak.[114] This is similar to the description of the work which the grandmother does for the male child, of whom, Durant Gonzales's Trinidadian informant says: 'Woman is a donkey. She works at work, then comes home and works again'.[115] Here, again, one sees the words that Hurston uses to describe the poor black woman of the region. These words are significant as they are used by a poor, black woman of the region to describe her own life and those of her sisters. But there is another side, the Caribbean woman's story, that belies this acceptance. What is divulged here, within the enclosure of Caribbean-generated discourse, is the necessity for women to work as hard as M'man Tine, in order to survive, particularly after abolition and emancipation.[116] M'man Tine, in this way, illustrates how life did not change after emancipation because she gained freedom, it rather forced her to work harder.[117]

Through abolition and emancipation, the (former) slave was perhaps more marginalised by new labour practices and indentureship. The realities that Zobel and Schwarz-Bart elucidate in their works demonstrate this clearly. Their characters

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113 Ibid. pp. 19-20.

114 See: hooks (1938).

115 Durant Gonzalez, *Women and the Family* ed. by Joycelin Massiah. (University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, Barbados, 1982), p. 12.

116 See: Scarano (1989); Momsen (1996); Brereton (1989).

117 See: Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., p. 49.

remain locked in slave-like labour in the canefields. Reine Sans Nom insists that Télumée avoid the canefields because she knows too well their hostility toward a young woman; she points out the continuity of hard labour in the canefields. Patrick Chamoiseau illustrates how the newly freed blacks had to adjust as new obstacles were put in their way. Their reality conflated with the addition of the new labour force that began around 1853 and made life more difficult. Because a new labour force was imported, the former slaves did not have the leverage to demand higher wages. They were rendered much more marginal as they had to work much harder to eke out a living. Also, as Patrick Chamoiseau illustrates in *Texaco*[118] the *griot* or source offers:[119]

> Les anciens esclaves refusent de travailler dans les champs et vont s'installer sur les huateurs. On veut les remplacer: arrivée des premiers travailleurs indiens (Koulis) à la Martinique. Ils seront suivis d'Africains et de Chinois, et, plus tard (1875), de commerçants syro-libanais (Syriens).[120]

Arguably, the slaves left the plantations to escape the memory of the torture they endured therein. It was also an attempt at a new beginning. The realisation of this ideal was, however, frustrated by the new labour force which meant that wage labourers were in surplus. This, once again, encouraged migration in search of work. Migration, as seen, was often gender specific and further entrenched the already matrilineal nature of many West Indian households.[121] This post-emancipation trend, therefore, exacerbated the hardships which many women experienced, particularly those who were heads of households. Although emancipation had been a reality for many years in Martinique, when Zobel writes his book the subjectivity of

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118 Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco*. (Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1992). *Texaco*. trans. by Rose-Myriam Rejouis and Val Vinokurov. (New York, Pantheon, 1997).

119 Chamoiseau uses the term '*L'informatrice*' for the source. This term is symbolic as a sign of 'true' source or informer. Chamoiseau also brings the term *'Marquer de Parole* or word scratcher. See: *Texaco*. op. cit. See also: Rosamunde A. Renard, 'Immigration and Indentureship in the French West Indies, 1848-1870', in *Caribbean Freedom* op. cit., pp. 161-168.

120 Ibid. p. 14.

121 See: Senior (1991); See also: Chapter One of this thesis.

M'man Tine is obvious. [122] Schwarz-Bart similarly enunciates the plight of the former slave when Télumée describes Élie's relationship with the cane.

> Élie criait, jurait tous se grands dieux que la canne ne le happerait pas, jamais, jamais il n'achèterait de coutelas pour aller dans la terre des Blancs. Il préférait plutôt se trancher les mains avec, il hacherait l'air et fendrait le vent, mais il ne ramasserait pas la malédiction. [. . .] sur une simple parole jetée en l'air, il avait échappé à la malédiction.[123]

Thus articulated in Élie's thoughts is the need to be independent, to be the master of one's own life, but also palpable is the realisation that this independence is extremely difficult to achieve. However, the belief in the power of the spoken word and its impact on one's life is important. As Schwarz-Bart illustrates, one can create good or bad luck simply by throwing a word into the air: *'Une feuille tombe et la forêt entière frémit'*.[124] But the allusions to slavery stretch throughout the book and perhaps one can see the new awareness of slavery's presence as a leaf falling and making the whole forest tremble; the repercussions are enormous. In an attempt to avoid poverty, Télumée considers swallowing her self-respect and independence to work in the cane fields. Reine Sans Nom's response to Télumée is therefore:

> mon petit soleil, pourquoi servir tes seize ans comme friandise à un contremaître?(et tout cela en échange de quoi, de quelle merveille: une place normale à désherber, une tâche où tu ne cracheras pas le sang, où tu ne tousseras pas au milieu d'herbes plus hautes que toi-même(et enfin dis-moi: où as-tu vu que les cannes se plantaient toute l'année?[125]

This is the worry of any mother; that her daughter will be spoilt by slave labour, as she had experienced in her time. Télumée argues that *'l'arbre de la fortune poussait aillures qu'à Fond-Zombi'*.[126] Expressly articulated is the lack of change, the lack of possibility in Fond-Zombie open to Télumée as a young 'negresse', but the possibility

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122 See also: Momsen (1996); Bridget Brereton, 'Society and Culture in the Caribbean: The British and French West (Indies, 1870-1980', in *The Modern Caribbean* ed. by Franklin W. Knight and Colin A. Palmer. (Chapel Hill, 1989); Francisco Scarano, 'Labor and Society in the Nineteenth Century', in Knight and Palmer, eds., op. cit.

123 Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., pp. 86-87.

124 Ibid. p. 111.

125 Ibid. p. 89.

126 Ibid. p. 89.

of leaving and moving to the world of the big city is never articulated. Therefore, she continues, *'En dépit des herbes coupantes, des fourmis rouges et des millepattes, j'aurais volontiers cassé mes reins dans les cannes, les rangées d'ananas'*,[127] Télumée remains imbricated in the poverty cycle perpetuated through enslavement and colonialism, albeit to a lesser extent than the women before her.[128]

Breaking The Trend: Striving to Move Beyond Hard Labour

This argument against a return to the former slave plantations is cogent as it is not only about survival, but also about breaking the pattern of female exploitation and perpetuation of the pattern within matrilineal societies, constructed within a patriarchal outer-world. One reads this link once again as it crosses over from Guadeloupe to Martinique where M'man Tine talks to her grandson after his request to be put into the *petites bandes*:

> Petit misérable! s'écria ma grand-mère; tu voudrais que je te fiche dans les petites-bandes, toi aussi! C'était donc ce que tu cherchais en me procurant tous ces désagréments sur l'habitation? Eh bé! j'aurais dû, pour de bon, t'envoyer ramasser du para, ou mettre du guano, comme ont fait les autres! C'est ce qu'il te faudrait pour connaître la misère et apprendre à te comporter. [. . .] Hein! comment cela pourait il finir si les pères y foutent leurs fils là-dedans, dans le même malheur? Eh bé! si j'y ai pas mis ta mère, c'est pas toi que j'y mettrai.[129]

But M'man Tine articulates more than her contempt for the system. She gives her history to her grandson, without which he would easily be dispossessed by the system. She refuses to perpetuate *le même malheur,* thus breaking the cycle. She inscribes on him a sense of self through her story, that, as Minh-ha argues, allows him to retell events as if he were there. She ignores official history, to give her grandson her truth about the world. She deconstructs the myth of the black whore who lusts after the white master ensnaring him in her web of sexual promiscuity.[130] She establishes the fact that the *béké* owner was her grandfather who raped her mother as she worked. She tells him how she was raped in the fields and so his mother was

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[127] Ibid p. 89.

[128] Bush (1990).

[129] Zobel op. cit., p. 79.

[130] See: Bush (1990).

not a child that she would have chosen to have. She tried her hardest with her daughter, so that Delia would not have to experience the same exploitation and abuse she had experienced:

> Moi, j'étais toujours baissée du matin au soir dans un sillon, ma tête plus bas que mon derrière, jusqu'à ce que le Commandeur, M. Valbrun, ayant vu comment j'étais faite, m' a tenue, m'a roulée à terre et m'a enforcé une enfant dans le ventre. Voila, eh bé! ta mère, j'ai pas voulu la mettre dans les petites-bandes. J'ai pas pu l'envoyer à l'école, parce qu'y avait pas encore d'école dans le bourg, mais je l'ai soignée et propitée jusqu'à l'âge de douze ans, comme si j'avais été une femme riche; et puis, je l'ai mise au pair chez Mme Léonce, au bourg. Elle a pas pris un mauvais chemin: elle a appris à laver, à repasser, à bruler du beurre.[131]

M'man Tine describes the treacherous nature of indentured labouring. She criticises José for even suggesting that she enlist him in the *petites-bandes*. She also embeds within her diatribe the polemics involved with the repetition of the poverty cycle played out in enlisting him in the *petites-bandes*. The paradox is that she gave all for her daughter and, by so doing, was able to elevate her from the torture of the canefields to the closer scrutiny and, perhaps, easier labour of the *béké's* house. This is a highly sought after position as it means more prestige, and thus more respect, but it does not, however, remove the subject from a life of servitude. Notwithstanding, it ends the subsuming relationship with the cane. In spite of popular opinion, one can conclude that not as many women as previously thought worked in the house, rather the majority worked in the fields. Like Delia, Télumée is given the chance to be a domestic for a rich white family. During this job, she is confronted by the reality that sexual exploitation is still alive and thriving. She describes this relationship with the *béké* when she attempts to find employment.

> [. . .] cherché une propriété au milieu de laquelle pousse un pied d'argent. Deux familles blanches vivaient dans le voisinage, [. . .] c'étaient les descendants du Blanc des Blancs, celui-là même qui faisait éclater la rate aux nègres, juste pour décolérer. [. . .] Mais le pied d'argent poussait dans leur cour, et j'avais beau tourner et retourner dans ma tête, Minerve, le Blanc des Blancs, la rate éclatée des nègres, ce qui m'attendait c'était l'habitation Belle-Feuille, chez les Desaragne. La rivière qui déborde entraîne les grosses roches, elle déracine des arbres mais le galet sur lequel tu dois te fendre le pied, elle le laissera pour toi, là. Mais rien n'est éternel, me dit grand-mère, pas même de secouer la poussière des Blancs [. . .][132]

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131 Zobel, op. cit., p. 43.

132 Schwarz-Bart op. cit., pp. 90-91.

Schwarz-Bart pointedly enunciates this murderous reality. Reine Sans Nom is exposed to the threat of the white master in the fields as is M'man Tine. M'man Tine works herself to the bone in order to provide a better life for her daughter. She says that 'Mr. Leonce, the foreman of the factory', knew that his boss needed a servant and:

> [I]l lui a envoyé ta mère, parce qu'il savait que c'était une fille capable de servir chez un béké, et que son patron allait bien le récompenser lui-même.
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> «Si elle avait pas recontré ton papa qui étais cocher de l'Administrateur, elle y serait peut-être jusqu'à l'heure. [. . .] Tout ce que je sais, y avait pas trois mois que ta mère t'avait déposé là dans ma chambre, minch! elle est partie pour Forte-de-France, pour se placer».[133]

This is an important point of departure for these women as it effectively elevates the family. Any further elevation can only result from a male child, José, or one of the family 'marrying-up'. However, Delia has been spoilt for 'marrying-up' as she already has a child.[134] Once Delia and José are reunited in the city, she accepts her responsibility of motherhood from M'man Tine. Keith Warner writes that Delia:

> is at first pictured [. . .] at work in the béké's houses in Fort de France, having precious little to care about, but she certainly rises to the occasion when it presents itself. [. . .] She takes over from M'man Tine and in many ways acts as an extension of her, [. . .] she is determined that her son will receive a secondary education [. . .][135]

This experience, however, further traps both Delia and M'man Tine in their own marginal world. By furthering the perpetuation of upward mobility, identification with the humble background becomes more problematic, more stigmatized. But all they can do is to encourage José's progression. They must appear to accept their lot in life; but, simultaneously, they push advancement.

There is, in this context, perhaps no other way of defeating marginality and exploitation than seeming acceptance. Subversion, however, needs space in which to locate itself and from thence to be coded. As Boyce Davies affirms, home as female-centred space becomes safe to '**talk**' with all the subversive implications of

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133 Zobel (1957), op. cit., pp. 43-44

134 'Spoilt' is used in the Caribbean sense of the result of having an illegitimate pregnancy.

135 Keith Q. Warner, op. cit., p. (v)

the word as she employs it.[136] The grandmother's shack thus becomes a safe space in which she and her offspring can collude to overcome oppression.[137] The grandmother's re-negotiation of terms and traditions and her **'talk'** is launched from this fixed location.

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[136] Boyce Davies (1994), op. cit., p. 153.

[137] Chapter Two explores the importance of space. Also see: bell hooks, 'Talking Back'. and 'marginality as site of resistance', in *Out There* ed. by Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Cornel West, op. cit., pp. 337-344.

The Importance of Space

A physical location, in spite of size, does not stop a person from being a person, even if it is within the hostile territory of the *béké's* canefields.[138] By inhabiting a clearly demarcated space, the grandmother does not compromise herself or her offspring; they exist in the face of poverty by exerting their humanity. These women use this delimited space to launch a great, even if silent, battle against marginalisation. Because they can unite in this place, their strength and strategy can be gathered to best survive in the outside world.[139] Reine Sans Nom's cabin becomes a safe space where they can come together and be peaceful while surrounded by a hostile world beyond their walls. But theirs is a space of resistance, an oppositional space.[140] Brinda Mehta also explores the importance of this female-centred space:

> "The family based on father right is a closed individual organism, whereas the matriarchal family bears the typically universal character that stands at the beginning of all development and distinguishes material life from spiritual life" (80). The mother principle is characterized by its global qualities of universality and all-expansiveness. The mother and her archaic powers are located at the point of origin, at the source of creation and development.[141]

It is from their own spaces that they speak out with great authority on the connection of grandmother to granddaughter and all following generations. Schwarz-Bart illustrates this at the commencement of the narrative:

> Le pays dépend bien souvent du cœur de l'homme: il est minuscule si le coeur est petit, et immense si le coeur est grand. Je n' ai jamais souffert de l'exiguïté de mon pays, sans pour autant prétendre que j'aie un grand cœur. Si on m'en donnait le pouvoir, c'est ici même, en Guadeloupe, que je choisirais de renaître, souffrir et mourir. Pourtant, il n'y a guère, mes ancêstres furent esclaves en cette île à volcans, à cyclones et moustiques, à mauvaise mentalité. Mais je ne suis pas venue sur terre pour soupeser toute la tristesse du monde. A cela, je préfère rêver, encore et encore, debout au milieu de mon jardin, comme

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138 See: Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., p. 11.

139 See: Boyce Davies (1994); bell hooks (1990).

140 Mehta (1997), op. cit., p. 238.

141 Mehta (1997), op. cit., p. 238-239. from J.J. Bachofen, Mehta continues to explore the importance of the mother principle and how it relates to the novel.

> le font toutes les vieilles de mon âge, jusqu'à ce que la mort me prenne dans mon rêve, avec toute ma joie...[142]

The space does not limit the heart. Nor, for that matter, does it limit the spirit or the hope. The strategic positioning of these women within this safe space is important to their survival and also to their stories being heard. As Mehta posits, their female centred space is open and universal. Even though the country may be hostile, it is this female-centred space that allows women an oppositional position to the discourse that seeks to erase them. This significance of space is further evidenced in Zobel's novel. Within M'man Tine's shack, as in Reine Sans Nom's, there is enough space to develop an entire new reality, a new counterdiscourse.[143] This is the space of subversion. It is in this space that the two worlds fuse, blurring barriers between the real and the unseen. The mythical is demythified in the grandmother's space. Within Tousine's shack, under her shadow and through the women before her, healing can take place. This is the location where the women unite and make one another whole again. Even though, as Télumée describes to the reader, the shack may be small and unadorned, it is a fortress which surrounds them with love and protection:

> Reine Sans Nom ouvrit la porte et me fit entrer dans la petite pièce qui composait tout son logis. Sitôt que j'eus franchi le seuil, je me sentis comme dans une forteresse, à l'abri de toutes choses connues et inconnues, sous la protection de la grande jupe à fronces de grand-mère. [. . .] Dans la case, un lit de fer était recouvert du drap du pauvre, quatre sacs de farine dont les inscriptions surnageaient, en dépit des nombreuses lessives. A lui seul, le lit occupait la moitié de l'espace. De l'autre côté il y avait une table, deux chaises; une berceuse de bois naturel, sans vernis.[144]

Space changes with movement from one place to another. Clearly depicted is the limitation of space as presented by the writers of these novels. The portable homeland that Julia Alvarez conjures in *The Other Side/El Otro lado* is once again called upon as personal space but which is almost subsumed under the cane.[145] Elizabeth Wilson observes that 'the "case" becomes a protective, nurturing space and Télumée is conscious of an unknown but special place and destiny within a

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142 Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., p. 11.

143 For discussion on language and resistance see: Glissant (1989); hooks (1990); Boyce Davis (1994).

144 Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., p. 48.

145 Julia Alvarez, *The Other Side/EL Otro Lado* (1995), op. cit., p. 117.

larger framework'.[146] Wilson's idea is that the space is adequate for these women and that what they are searching for is an internal journey which indicates less of a need to physically leave in favour of exile in the metropolis. The women do not, however, remain physically static throughout their whole lives; they do move. There are sporadic migrations from one part of the island to another. However, overseas migration leads to irreparable estrangement from one's essence. Romero-Cesareo illustrates this rootedness to home:

> In the French Antilles, the idea of leaving one's birthplace, by choice or involuntarily, is a highly complex matter as it is tied to particular family structures, traditions, and religious beliefs regarding life and death. A person is literally "tied" to the homeland by virtue of the fact that the umbilical cord, along with the placenta, is usually buried close to his or her birthplace under a young tree on the family's plot of land. The person should be buried in the same place; if this is not possible, the water used to bathe the corpse should be thrown on the ground where the umbilical cord is planted.[147]

Reine Sans Nom and Télumée remain in Guadeloupe perhaps because they are all too aware of the alienation that awaits anyone in exile. Schwarz-Bart has illustrated this spiritual alienation that results from physical displacement or exile in *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes* where the *vieille femme* feels isolated from her essence.[148] One can argue that M'man Tine, Reine Sans Nom, and Télumée's permanence is due to their belief that the size of the land or space does not matter. Instead, what matters is the size of the heart. By remaining on the island perhaps these women, and particularly M'man Tine, can avoid the madness that often results from exile in the metropolis, as is evidenced in Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane.*[149] Moreover, Zobel and Schwarz-Bart demonstrate the differences in migrations between men, who tend to leave their home and go afar in search of a future, and women, who are more limited in their movement because of their children. These characters, however, choose travel even if it is within a limited sphere. The writers also illustrate that when their female protagonists move, they move their houses with them. This is due

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146 Elizabeth Wilson, 'Le Voyage et l'espace clos' Island and Journey as Metaphor: Aspects of Woman's Experience in the Works of Francophone Women Writers', in *Out of the Kumbla* ed. by Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, (1990), op. cit., p. 56.

147 Romero-Cesareo (1997), op. cit., p. 249.

148 Simone and André Schwarz-Bart, *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1967).

149 Myriam Warner-Vieyra, *Juletane* (Paris, Présence Africaine, 1982).

to their status as non-landholding workers who own only the structure in which they reside, but borrow or rent the land from the *békés*. Both writers thus initiate a discourse that establishes the disparities between those who have and those who have not. In Zobel's novel, the father goes off to France to fight, and after the war has finished, does not return, or if he does, he does not establish contact with his son, of whose existence he is probably unaware. José's father left his mother before she gave birth, without leaving an address where he could be found. George Lamming's narrator articulates this well, when he observes that his father only fathered the idea of him and disappeared well before G's birth.[150]

Boyce Davies observes that '[t]he mark of motherhood is often ascribed to women's inability to travel'.[151] She goes further to say that: 'one of the impediments to women having the ability to travel is their children and/or societal constructions of biological motherhood'.[152] However, Reine Sans Nom and Télumée appear unaware of these restrictions which motherhood places on them. They still desire to travel or move around the island. They also break with society's constructs:

> [. . .] nous la [case] déposerons au morne La Folie, sur les terres de M. Boissanville... je l'ai connu, autrefois, il ne refusera pas une parcelle de terrain, et lorsque tes ignames et tes pois donneront, tu seras une femme et demie sur la terre... Ainsi, au long de ses derniers jours, grand-mère fabriquait-elle du vent pour gonfler mes voiles, me permettre de reprendre mon voyage sur l'eau.[153]

Zobel, conversely, illustrates that the idea of a woman's inability to travel due to motherhood can be circumvented, as M'man Tine becomes the substitute for his biological mother. José does not criticise his mother's decision to leave in search of work, in order to improve her situation, since many second generation Caribbean women with children leave them with their mothers, and are encouraged to do so in order to make money. It is also felt that the older woman has much more experience raising children and so will do a better job. As evidenced here, the central point is that everyone must return in order to re-establish some order in their lives: Telumée and Reine Sans Nom illuminate the significance of the grandmother's home, as it is within the grandmother's clearly demarcated, delineated space that Télumée finds

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150 Lamming (1953), op. cit., p. 3.

151 Boyce Davies (1994), op. cit., p. 135.

152 Ibid.

153 Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., p. 174.

herself. Physical structure is vital, and symbolic here, as explored above, because of the protection that it offers and the chance to connect with the spiritual part of life, as seen in the experience which Télumée has the first time that she goes into Reine Sans Nom's shack.[154] *Tan fe tan tan lese tan*, forms an image of continuity. Conversely, Wilson sees the delimited space as a trap. The trap in this conjuring provides safe space for mental transcendences that blur the very boundaries that hem these women in:

> The closed space, protective and reassuring for the protagonist who is content to be within, becomes a trap and a prison for the individual who is or should be desperate to get out. The journey within, Schwarz-Bart's narrator suggests, promises more than an escape to France or to Africa. Télumée in her garden is a figure of hope and quiet strength, a tribute to the part of Caribbean womanhood which continues to resist and to endure no matter what restrictions and burdens are placed upon her.[155]

In this context, the trap is a much larger one for the prison has no walls. The surrounding canefields are the trap. In the introduction to *Black Shack Alley*, Keith Warner quotes from Brian Weinstein, who sees the plantation as its own prison.[156] It is similar to the experience in Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. Women, like M'man Tine, Reine Sans Nom, and Télumée, and their female networks, live fully, as Baker argues, so that their homes and gardens have become safe spaces[157] where **talk** can take place.[158] This safe space for these black women is established against the still clearly demarcated space of plantation:

> The plantations or *habitations* of these former colonies created racial classes and were the key to a permanently dependent economy. [. . .] the white owner lived surrounded by his black slaves who cultivated and cut the cane and transformed it on the spot to sugar and rum.[159]

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154 Wilson, op. cit., p. 56.

155 Ibid., p. 56.

156 Keith Warner, 'Introduction'(1974).

157 Houston A. Baker Jr. (1991).

158 Boyce Davies (1994).

159 Warner (1974), op. cit., p. (ii).

The land may be in the hands of the *békés*[160] but, in its fullest significance, it is home to these women, once they convert their borrowed portion into a non-hostile environment. It is on this exorcised space that they will build their house. The *case* and *jardin* thus provide a gateway into a larger (un)limited space, a way out of the entrapment of the cane, even if it is only spiritual or metaphysical. But home does not have to be secured on hostile ground.

In 'This Gift of Metaphor', Abena P. A. Busia argues in favour of Télumée having situated herself through the efforts of her grandmother:

> By the end, she is finally speaking from a fixed point which is also her home—the cabin in which she was raised by her grandmother. She has moved this cabin from site to site to its final resting place in the town by the edge of the sea. There is a strong and integral unity between the place, the natural world, and the people and their spiritual worlds, and in Telumee's life it is the women who have taught her how to speak of the bridges between them.[161]

M'man Tine also moves her shack to a better place so that José can have more opportunity. Meanwhile, Télumée and Reine Sans Nom move from one place to another in search of more economic security and a permanent location, as the world beyond the clearly delineated, delimited space is unimportant. Télumée tells the reader how she feels in Reine Sans Nom's space.[162] Reine Sans Nom, Télumée, and M'man Tine remain in their cabins but allow their spiritual growth and development to go beyond the delimited space.

The Female Line Shall Not Be Severed

Metaphorically, the female ancestral line in these texts is the link that keeps these characters rooted. In Danticat's works, the female line is the only one that has any continuity. The narrator expresses the marginal status of women in Haiti and the exploitation that they endure at the hands of the army and both political states. The grandmother is the protracted point around which life is created. It is her house in

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[160] See: Chamoiseau (1992); Briget Brereton (1989).

[161] Abena P. A. Busia, 'This Gift of Metaphor. Symbolic Strategies and The Triumph of Survival in Simone Schwarz-Bart's *The Bridge of Beyond* ', in *Out of the Kumbla*, op. cit., p. 299.

[162] See: Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., p. 48.

the old world to which the women must travel in order to come to terms with life and themselves, as happens with Télumée and her reconnection with her grandmother.

This is perhaps in direct relation with the *Créole* phrase *'male pa kin klaksonn'*, 'misfortune arrives unannounced',[163] as it is usually due to some unforeseen disaster that the female characters suffer. The protagonists' temporary lapses into depression are healed by the community of women, and their female kin, as the ranks close around them so that they are aware of the eternal presence and support of the female line. These disasters are dealt with by physical exile in Danticat's work. A similar situation is evidenced in *Pluie et vent* when Télumée is taken to Reine Sans Nom's *case* across the 'Bridge of Beyond', because she has become a threat to her mother's happiness. There is no competition between grandmother and granddaughter as there is between mother and daughter.[164] The only issue between the women is the spiritual and sanguimeous link that binds them together.

In Edwidge Danticat's *Krik? Krak!* the necessity of retaining contact with the female line is emphasised.[165] This female link provides the stories and information to form identities which allow the individual to decipher her/his place within the universe and particularly among her/his ancestors. Even in physical separation from the home place, which is at the crux of Danticat's work, a transcendent spiritual anchor will always remain. This is what Gloria Estefan refers to as *sus raíces transcendentes*.[166] It is similar to Glissant's floating rootedness:[167] roots which reach out to the diaspora and connect them to a sense of home. Unlike Zobel's work, where a male child can break the curse, women are left to manage their own lives without the intervention of male progeny. The writers in this chapter liberate their female characters from the enclosure of stereotypical representation.

Reine Sans Nom's story is symbolic as it ties into Télumée's revelation of her relationship with slavery. As Minh-ha argues, the grandmother's stories 'allow her to recall incidents that occurred before she was born with as much certainty as if she

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163 Disaster arrives without warning. Creole phrase comes from interviews in Nassau and cross referenced in Ovide (1996).

164 See: Kincaid's works.

165 Edwidge Danticat, *Krik? Krak!* (New York, Soho, 1995).

166 Gloria Estefan (1993).

167 Glissant (1989), op. cit., p. 67

had witnessed them herself'.[168] Thereby the listener can learn about events that official history leaves out or downplays. They thus become incorporated into her life as if they were her own lived experiences. The lenses have changed from those of a naïve young girl to a woman who carries her female ancestors with her, like the 'hair on her head'.[169] Knowledge is passed on through this line. Télumée articulates how she learns many things, from spiritual healing to the history of her home, from her grandmother and the women around her:

> Pour la première fois de ma vie, je sentais que l'esclavage n'était pas un pays étranger, une région lointaine d'où venaient certaines personnes très anciennes, comme il en existait encore deux ou trois, à Fond-Zombi. Tout cela s'était déroulé ici même, dans nos mornes et nos vallons, et peut-être à côté de cette touffe de bambou, peut-être dans l'air que je respirais.[170]

Slavery becomes a part of Télumée's life. It is significant that she is reconnected with this aspect of the past. Virgil Suárez and Pablo Medina write that their grandmothers' stories also brought history alive for them; something that the textbooks in school did not do.[171] Reine Sans Nom's stories go beyond this as they re-valorise a deeply politicised silence. In the act of equating slavery's presence with the air that she breathes, Schwarz-Bart's narrator gives greater impact to slavery's omnipotent, sinister existence. Arguably, this remembering of the past is a confrontation of cultural invasion, which, as Paulo Freire argues 'is always an act of violence against the persons of the invaded culture'.[172] Slavery presents a problem for the seamless narrative of cultural homogenisation and harmony that assimilation theory promotes and is therefore preferably erased. As the 'cultural invaders are the authors of the process', they attempt to achieve this erasure by writing slavery out of history or placing it as a mere footnote in time.[173] However, by rejuvenating their oral histories, the grandmothers, counter this attempt at silence and historical

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168 Minh-ha (1989), op. cit., p. 136.

169 Danticat (1995).

170 Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., p. 65.

171 Virgil Suárez, *Spared Angola: Memories from a Cuban-American Childhood* (Houston, Arte Público, 1997).

172 Freire (1994), op. cit., p. 135.

173 Freire (1994), op, cit. Ibid.

misrepresentation.[174] They thereby become the actors in their history and are not simply acted on by the invaders.[175] Zobel similarly illustrates the hardships inherent in the post-emancipation canefields. He, thus, directly elucidates a link between slavery and post-slavery that official discourse plays down in favour of cohesion and a peaceful balance between the classes. However, by remembering this story, the writers disallow the erasure of the 'Other' version that perpetuates female marginalisation.

Zobel allows the reader insight into M'man Tine's spirit, which, similar to Reine Sans Nom's, grows weaker with each day of servitude in this world, and begins the transcendence into the next world, but must keep itself together in spite of the hardships imposed on the body:

> Tous les matins, m'man Tine cusait là-dedans, en maugréant que les feuilles de canne, il n'y avait rien de tel pour manger les hardes de pauvres nègres. Cette robe n'était rien autre qu'une tunique sordide où toutes les couleurs s'étaient juxtaposées, multipliées, superposées, fondues.[176]

The hardships of life in the cane fields for these women are forcefully described in these novels along with the rooting that takes place. Zobel illustrates that everything is done for José. As the novel progresses, there is a constant revealing of wisdom or liberating of knowledge that occurs. These revelations move from a superficial to a deeper level. As with Télumée's awakening to the true reality that surrounds her, José is brought into the truth of the suffering that M'man Tine lives. Naïveté is replaced by experience. This also causes a confusion that will take him a long time to sort through; deciding what will serve him and what will not. There is also anger at his grandmother for being who she is because he has no other way of expressing his confusion:

> Ainsi, à un âge où je me sentais naturellment voué à tant d'insouciance, tous mes élans étaient en même temps freinés par la constante soufrance, par une sorte d'écrasement qui pesait de plus en plus sur ma grand-mère d'une façon odieuse.

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[174] See also: Joan Dayan (1995), op. cit. where she discusses the erasing of slavery from Haitian history.

[175] Freire (1994), op. cit. p. 135.

[176] Zobel, op. cit., p. 11.

> Plus que je considérais m'man Tine, plus j'avais l'intuition qu'elle était soumise à une peine injuste et qui, parfois, la faisait paraître plus effrayante que pitoyable.[177]

She is not submissive, however. José's confusion is increased by exposure to a different set of values in the outside world rather than those he learns at home.

Colonial Education Creating Isolation

There is a double-consciousness fostered by colonial education, where children are expected to forget what they know from home and learn how to be 'civilised' subjects, learning to speak French instead of *Créole*, for example. This is significant as the cultural codes embedded in the language are completely distinct. The education that José receives is particularly alienating as it is modeled for young boys and girls in France, negating the existence of 'Others' beyond the French continental shores.[178] He must, therefore, cogitate, like the other students, on the messages sent openly through the education system to alienate him from himself and his family. But José is strong enough to circumvent the displacement caused by education and the physical change.

The displacement and relocations that take place throughout Zobel's novel, the uprootings of homes and lives are an act of sacrifice. Life is a constant sacrifice for M'man Tine where she willingly places herself at a disadvantage in order to privilege José. This privileging also results in a syndrome akin to Franz Fanon's 'black skin, white masks'.[179] The character is left feeling completely confused in who s/he is, whether s/he is white or black. This is similar to the experiment to which Edward Long makes reference, quoted at the beginning of Chapter One. The syndrome leads to a denial of the black culture, as the person has placed a white mask to cover the blackness of the skin. It can, therefore, cause psychological problems by alienating the individual from her/himself. José is rendered temporarily inarticulate. He must evolve from this state and learn how to speak for himself from his grandmother, albeit posthumously. José voices his grandmother's devotion to him when he tells the reader: '*Ses compagnes de travail en faisaient souvent la remarque, et*

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[177] Zobel op. cit., p. 235.

[178] See: Chapter Two for discussion on Anglophone Caribbean and education.

[179] See: Franz Fanon, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1952).

m'man Tine disait qu'elle ne pouvait porter quoi que ce soit à sa bouche qu'elle ne m'eût réservé une part'.[180]

This devotion is most certainly tempered by a severe tyrannical insistence on good behaviour and success. M'man Tine does not dote on José senselessly. She doles out love and punishment equally. As Warner states: 'The floggings, therefore, stem not from the cruelty of a wicked grandmother, but rather from the loving guardian who in this way assures herself of success in the task of raising a well-behaved child'.[181]

José's advancement is a reflection on M'man Tine's success as a grandmother. If he does not turn out the way she insists, she may be viewed as a failure by the community. She must therefore disallow any opportunity for his divergence from the role set for him, by being a strict disciplinarian and making sure he remains focused on his task of ascending the social ladder. She cannot afford, physically or economically to have him become less than the successful young man whom she envisages. Thus, M'man Tine does what she considers best for her grandson.[182] In one instance, she tells him in the morning, before leaving for work: *Je vais voir si le Bon Dieu me donne encore la force de lutter dans les cannes de M. le béké*![183] After her return from the canefields, she is aware that the house has been turned upside down in search of precious sugar, and she punishes José. M'man Tine inflicts pain on José, perhaps a result of her frustration at working all day and coming home to face disrespect; she feels that she must control him if he is to come to anything at all.[184] She is too poor to indulge bad behaviour. According to her, it is the place of the wealthy to indulge their offspring in bad behaviour. Whatever José does puts her in a difficult position before the habitation authorities. His grandmother must ensure that her investment reaps a good harvest. There are, however, pitfalls on the way. One of them is José's confusion at the mixed messages received from the outside world and M'man Tine's. This is exemplified when José's schoolteacher questions him about his family's occupations:

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[180] Zobel op. cit., pp. 9-10.

[181] Warner (1974), op. cit., p. (v).

[182] In many parts of the West Indies older people firmly believe that in sparing the rod the child will be spoilt. But there must be a balance between love and discipline.

[183] Zobel (19570, op. cit., p. 19.

[184] See: Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* op. cit.

> Sans aucune arrière-pensée, j'avais naïvement donné ceux de ma mère, blanchisseuse, avec mon adresse en ville; et ausi naïvement, c'etait le nom de m'man Tine qui était sorti de ma bouche, comme parent principale. Mais, à sa «profession», j'avais bafouillé. D'abord je ne connaissais pas, en français, le nom du métier qu'elle faisait. Non, cela n'existait certainement pas en français.[185]

French does not articulate M'man Tine's reality. These women do not exist except as chattel in the French world. Language, in this case, excludes those who toil in the master's fields, effecting an erasure in hegemonic discourse. Created by José's experiences at school, then, is a rift between essence and future. M'man Tine is José's essence, his connection to his ancestors and, thus, himself. Insofar as José holds a deep spiritual connection to his people and himself, M'man Tine provides that link. However, he is expected to leave behind his grandmother and what she stands for in order to move forward toward success and civility in the colonial world away from the safety of home.

Education takes on paramount importance in the offspring's life as it determines their success or failure. While José receives a conventional Western education, Télumée is educated in alternative arts. The grandmothers become the only means by which the offspring can thus succeed in their education. They provide all their needs. However, the grandmothers are also marginalised in the education process.

M'man Tine illustrates how her world is segregated into *nous et ils*. *Nous* can never be *ils* and *ils* will never be *nous*. The language itself signals separation. Even education cannot deconstruct this barrier, but it can offer some access into a world that is closed to *nous sans education*. José will be encouraged to become the next generation of *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* where:[186]

> Aux Antilles, le jeune Noir, qui à l'écol [. . .] s'identifie à l'explorateur, au civilisateur, au Blonc qui apporte la vérité aux sauvages, une vérité toute blanche.l'enfant noir, soumis à la même socialisation que l'enfant blanc, s'identifie aux valeurs blanches. [. . .] c'est-à-dire que le jeune Noir adopte subjectivement une attitude de blanc. [187]

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[185] Zobel (1957), op. cit., p. 234.

[186] Franz Fanon, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1952).

[187] Fanon (1952), op. cit., p. 120.

Clearly, education is meant to separate the selected ones from the 'Others'. M'man Tine insists on José receiving that education, even if *ils* try to frustrate her plans, because it is his only way out of the poverty cycle:

> *Ils* sont trop méchants! C'est parce que nous sommes des petits nègres, pauvres et seuls, qu'*ils* t'ont pas donné une bourse entière. [. . .] Mais *ils* savent pas quelle femme de combat je suis. Eh bé! j'abandonnerai pas ce quart de bourse. Tu iras dans *leur* lycée![188]

'Leur lycée' further exaggerates the separation between those in positions of power and the disenfranchised. M'man Tine expresses that because of their reality they are open to even more exploitation. They then become *The Wretched of the Earth*[189] in the eyes of the phallocentric colonial power. Like all the other women, she will not give up: *Mais ils savent pas quelle femme de combat je suis.*[190] M'man Tine, as '[m]ost of the memorable women of Caribbean Literature [is] not only [grand]mother; [she is a] [grand]mother whose sole purpose in life has been to provide for [her] [grand]child'.[191]

In order to progress, as exemplified by José, the male child soon sees his roots as the source of great embarrassment. Like many others in West Indian literature,[192] he tries to forget his roots after he has attained a certain status. There is a certain embarrassment about his humble beginnings after receiving an education. This is often worsened by travel to the metropolis for further education, resulting in a denial of the grandmother, the embodiment of humble beginnings. This distancing from the past obscures the very roots that have made him who he is. The mother and grandmother have in this way further marginalised themselves in an attempt at self-liberation through the male child.[193]

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188 Zobel, op. cit., p. 216.

189 Frantz Fanon, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (Paris, Editions de Seuil, 1952); *The Wretched of the Earth* trans. by Constance Farrington, (New York, Grove Press, 1963).

190 Zobel, op. cit., p. 216.

191 Janice Lee Liddell, 'The Narrow Enclosure of Motherdom/Martyrdom: A Study of Gartha Randall Barton in Sylvia Wynter's *The Hills of Hebron'*, in *Out of the Kumbla* op. cit., p. 322.

192 See: Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin;* Naipaul's *Miguel Street;* and Bennett's *God the Stonebreaker,* for example.

193 See: previous chapters.

Women Taking on Magnified Roles

This occurrence is by no means restricted to Caribbean culture. One example of a similar situation beyond the region is Catherine Obianuju Acholonu's story 'Mother was a Great Man',[194] which explores the same issue in a Western African context, where it is the boy who gives joy and respectability to the grandmother. This case is not present in Schwarz-Bart's work, as the women continue to have girls and are happy doing so. Reine Sans Nom celebrates her re-acquaintance with her granddaughter. She feels that her life has changed for the better:

> Souse ce regard lointain, calme et heureux qui était le sien, la pièce me parut tout à coup immense et je sentis que d'autres personnes s'y trouvaient, pour lesquelles Reine Sans Nom m'examinait, m'embrassait maintenant, poussant de petits soupirs d'aise. Nous n'étions pas seulement deux vivantes dans une case, au milieu de la nuit, c'était autre chose et bien davantage, me semblait-il, mais je ne savais quoi. A la fin elle chuchota rêveusement, tant pour moi que pour elle-même... je croyais que ma chance était morte, mais aujourd'hui je le vois bien: je suis née négresse à chance, et je mourrai négresse à chance.[195]

Girls, unfortunately, do not have the same opportunity to receive the education that boys have, simply because of their gender,[196] but they are expected to do much of the work. They succeed at life simply because they have no other choice. However, women do take charge of both the private sphere and some aspects of the public.

Be that as it may, it is perhaps only through 'breaking the trend' that women see themselves as progressing. Implicit in 'breaking the trend' is the birth of a son; a male who will be able to improve the family's position.[197] Thence arises the noted divergence in the way many grandmothers treat their grandsons over their granddaughters.[198] But, women make do in order to push ahead and succeed in life. In 'Women and the Family in the Caribbean', Hermione Mckenzie illustrates that:

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[194] Catherine Obianuju Acholonu 'Mother was a Great Man' *The Heinemann Book of African Women's Writing* ed. by Charlotte Bruner. (Oxford, Heinemann, 1993), pp.

[195] Schwarz-Bart (1972), op. cit., p. 49.

[196] This could still be argued in the case of some communities within the Caribbean.

[197] See: Foster (1995).

[198] See: Chapter two.

> Women exercise a great deal of initiative and strength in 'making do'. Child-bearing and child-rearing are also identified as important instrumental areas for the female role. It is in these activities that women find the greatest opportunities to exercise responsibility, decision-making autonomy, and control over self and others. In the above domain they may be said to surpass men in status.[199]

M'man Tine is an example of Mckenzie's description. She takes the decision to send José to school and will not accept defeat. Meanwhile, she realises that she will be pushing herself further into the margins because of the great effort required to combat *ils* who will not provide a full scholarship for José. In this way, Zobel highlights this facility of making do in the narrator's description of black women.[200] They take on a magician-like quality in order to survive society's persecution of them:

> Eh bien! c'est à croire que vraiment cette catégorie de femmes que sont les vieilles mères noires et pauvres détiennent, dans le cœur qui bat sous leurs haillons, comme un pouvoir de changer la crasse en or, de rêver et de vouloir avec une telle ferveur que, de leurs mains terrreuses, suantes et vides, peuvent écolre les réalités les plus palpables, les plus immaculées et les plus précieuses. Car déjà, à chaque dimanche, retour de Saint-Esprit, m'man Tine rapportait soit un coupon de tissu, soit une paire de chaussettes.[201]

M'man Tine makes do. She works day and night to achieve her goals, ensuring that her family does not fall into the repeating cycle of poverty. In both novels, *Pluie et vent* and *Rue Cases*, the strain of life can be sensed from the descriptions given. This struggle is increased, as McKenzie and Durant Gonzalez point out, by the need to better the self through the offspring. Life would arguably be easier if these women were to follow the examples of the other blacks, the ones M'man Tine condemns, who enlist their children in the *petites-bandes*. However, by so doing, they perpetuate the cycle of imbricated and enslaved wo/men. As stated above, the grandmother's act of minimalising and marginalising herself for the improvement of her grandchildren's lives is a significant rhythmically repeating motif in the region's history and literature.

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199 Hermione Mckenzie, 'Introduction: Women and the Family in Caribbean Society', in *Women and the Family*, ed. by Joycelin Massiah, (Barbados, 1982), p. (vii).

200 This is also--and more often--referred to in the Caribbean as 'turning hand'/to turn one's hand'

201 Zobel (1957), op. cit., p. 185.

These women are so insistent on improving the lives of their offspring because they look around themselves and see that the world is changing, offering future generations opportunities that they themselves never had. They are therefore seemingly willing to silence themselves to outsiders' ears, but not to those of their kin, so that they can send their grandchildren to school and make a break with a part of the past that needs to be changed. By allowing these changes to occur, these characters achieve a certain amount of empowerment. The grandmother as source and *l'informatrice* can tell her-story to the word scratchers or *marqueurs de parole,* her grandchildren, and have it recorded.[202] In this way, the source's voice is heard loudly into the future. By reading across the genre/gender lines, a fuller story can be released from the gaps in between.

Gendered Constructions/Constructing Gender

As discussed throughout this work, the relationship between the grandmother and her grandchildren is very often gender specific. The two primary texts herein examined were chosen specifically for this reason; the grandmother in one raises her granddaughter while the grandmother in the other raises her grandson. Euzhan Palcy's *Sugar Cane Alley* clearly illuminates that gender specificity of education and advancement are clearly palpable in the literature and life of the region.[203] M'man Tine raises José and insists that he receive an education to improve his position in life. Conversely, the same may not have been possible for a young granddaughter. Access to education has always been gendered, allowing and encouraging young men, but discouraging young women from pursuing their ambitions.[204]

Perhaps Zobel, writing from the male perspective, was therefore given access to an education which would have been denied a young women in his position, growing-up with the same grandmother.[205] Therefore, when Palcy constructs the film version of his novel, she actively pursues this thread as a way of illustrating the need

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202 Chamoiseau (1992).

203 Euzhan Palcy, Director *Rue Cases-Nègres Sugar Cane Alley* (Co-Production NEF Diffusion, ORCA Productions, SU.MA.PA, 1983).

204 See: Joycelin Massiah, *Women and Education*

205 See: Chapter two; and Maryse Condé *La parole des femmes: Essai sur des romancieres des Antilles de langue francaise* (1979) Paris, L'Harmattan, 1993).

to deconstruct the gender construction of education.[206] In Schwarz-Bart's novel, on the other hand, the women who privilege alternative aspects of education do not receive a conventional education that will elevate them to another station in the outside world. This could also pose a problem in the continuation or perpetuation of the gender stigma given to education and the belief that women or girls do not need to be educated.[207]

Although it is arguable that gender constructs restrain the potential of the characters in these novels, Télumée is educated and does ascend to a position of prominence within the community. The authors vary here in their concept of education. Where Zobel privileges a Western style education, Schwarz-Bart privileges a traditional education that harks back to Africa. As Romero-Cesareo argues:

> Télumée stresses the holistic coexistence of body and soul, the help she can provide to heal both physically and emotionally. [. . .] She assists her community as they suffer the onslaught of miseries caused by drought, disease, and the "Strike of Death", in which strikers die at the hand of white factory owners. [. . .] Not only does Télumée "write" ("make signs") the way she has been taught, but she also creates a new "vocabulary" (signs) according to the changing needs of the community.[208]

The education both characters receive is implicated in the success of the community as they, as young people, represent its future. By carrying the stories and knowledge forward in their distinct ways, both José and Télumée privilege their ancestors' knowledge: José by transmitting their stories to a greater audience, thus increasing awareness, and Télumée by keeping alive the traditions while also working to heal the community. Although this claim seems to maintain the gendered construct of society and education, the writers also illustrate the need for the coexistence of both forms of knowledge and living. Télumée then embodies Minh-ha's words that the magic is carried on through the female line. There are, however, exceptions to this rule. This framework of magic as the only way to empowerment is often broken, but

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206 For discussion on film and novel see: Mbye Cham, 'Introduction: Shape and Shaping of Caribbean Cinema', in *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema* ed. by Mbye Cham, (Trenton, Africa World Press, 1992), pp. 1-43; Keith Q. Warner, 'Film, Literature, and Identity in the Caribbean', in *Ex-Iles* op. cit., pp. 44-58; Alain Ménil, *Rue Cases-Nègres* or the Antilles from the Inside', trans. by Oumar Ka, in *Ex-Iles* op. cit., pp. 155-175.; Stuart Hall, 'Cultural identity and cinematic representation'. *Ex-Iles* op. cit., pp. 220-236; June Givanni, 'Interview with Euzhan Palcy', in *Ex-Iles* op. cit., pp. 286-307; Maryse Condé, 'Epilogue: Cinema, Literature, and freedom', trans. by Marise La Grenade-Lashley, in *Ex-Iles* op. cit., pp. 370-377; Sylvie César, *«Rue Cases-Nègres» du Roman au Film (Étude comparative)* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1994).

207 See: *Women and Education.*

208 Romero-Cesareo (1997), op. cit., p. 260-261.

more so by women writers, like the Haitian writer Marie Chauvet. Chauvet insists that her female characters move beyond the magic-religious realm of the community's houngan by spawning political activism.[209] While José moves out from the community Télumée remains in the hope of assisting with its future progress. She, with the tools given to her by Ma Cia and those Reine Sans Nom willed to her, creates the new discourse that her community needs for survival. Her grandmother stands at the centre of this discourse and is conflated with Ma Cia to become one ancestral being that Télumée will embody, as Medouze and M'man Tine do for José. Télumée's discourse is what Romero-Cesareo refers to as a new 'vocabulary'.[210] Perhaps in this way the limitations imposed by a non-Western education are surmounted, and the character is not marginalised by her choice to remain and become a spiritual healer, shaman. Also, the gendered constructs may be subverted to reveal a validity in the local knowledge that has been devalued. M'man Tine and Reine Sans Nom transcend the barriers between inside/outside which promote exclusion. By privileging their own realities and teaching resistance from the margins, they teach their grandchildren how to survive.

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209 See: Marie Chauvet, *Fonds-des-nègres* (Port-au-Prince, Imprimerie Henri Deschamps, 1960). Chauvet's writing in general breaks a great many of the trends that women were expected to uphold. Male writers do not necessarily render the same depictions in their work.

210 Romero-Cesareo (1997), op. cit., p. 260.

Conclusion:
'Alé-a sé ta'w, viré-a sé tamwen': Reconsidering the Grandmother as a timeless Literary and Cultural Icon

The Beginning of Wisdom
Is
Knowing who you are.
Draw near and listen.

Swahili Proverb[1]

> An old granny smokes her pipe, surrounded by the village children. Her eyes are cloudy and her upper lip is sagging for lack of supporting teeth. [...] selling her baskets of fruit, the market woman is the archetypal citizen. She works, she dreams, she fears, mostly she fears for her children. To work in the world and to honour the spirits is what her life is. "We tell our stories so that the young ones will know what came before them. They ask Krik? we say Krak! Our stories are kept in our hearts.[2]

The grandmother holds wisdom in the guise of stories. Wisdom is passed on from generation to generation. It is the foundation of a culture. It goes beyond the written record whose 'adequacy' Glissant questions, into the archives of the collective unconscious. Often, wisdom, or the stories which hold this wisdom, are not written but are oral and passed on from mouth to ear. So when the grandmother of archetypal presence says to her offspring *pa kité jou baré'w* lost time can never be regained. Her statement is clear.

It should be evident from the works presented herein that the Caribbean grandmother is a primary literary and cultural icon. Her primacy in West Indian families results in her being manifest as an archetypal presence in Caribbean literature. When the father figure is absent, the grandmother often assumes an expanded supportive role in her female offspring's life. Moreover, in the absence of both parents she becomes the primary care-giver to her grandchildren. Her accented role in their lives, though, is not only evidenced in instances of parental absence, but, as seen in *Beka Lamb* and *Dreaming in Cuban,* also in their presence. The grandmother provides her offspring with a spiritual anchor, a loving presence, a strict disciplinarian and a strong parental figure. The West Indian grandmother of African descent teaches her offspring traditions and survival skills that may have been lost in her absence. She holds knowledge that binds future generations to the past, to their history. This *sabiduria* is a formative part of their personal and cultural identities. She thereby is an archetypal presence in the Caribbean writer's imagination.

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[1] Richard Allsopp, *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (Oxford, Oxford UP, 1996), p. i.

[2] Sal Scalora, 'White Darkness/Black Dreamings', in *Haiti: Feeding the Spirit* (Aperture, New York, 1992), p. 73.

When considering the role of the grandmother in Caribbean society it is important, as this thesis has illustrated, how this role translates into literature. A multitude of questions arise when met at this point of a study that has argued for opening a dialogue between literature and social history to examine the intricate role the grandmother plays within the culture.

One of these questions that arises is whether the grandmother will continue to be such a significant and binding rhythm with future generations of writers? Perhaps her primary role in the family and therefore her foundational importance in the literature will diminish. As time changes and development or 'Westernisation' threatens the way of life of which the grandmother is a governing figure, her place could be taken over by someone else. Perhaps Caribbean demography will change and again alter the cultural dynamics within the region. All of these are questions whose answers can only be speculated at and through extension a link may be established for the future of the literature of the region.

While the West Indies is undergoing significant cultural and economic change, certain truisms appear to continue. The fact that there still remains a high demand for cheap labour articulates a continued need to move in search of work. This coupled with areas of higher population concentrations and lower economic prosperity initiates a new or renewed migratory pattern. Younger individuals still move from rural areas to urban in search of a better future. Children of these young people are still often left in their town of origin until they are old enough to be relocated or their parent(s) has/have amassed sufficient funds to bring them to their location. For example, in the Bahamas, individuals in late adolescence, and into their early twenties will often leave the Family Islands in search of employment in the capital. Women, particularly, if they have already had children, will leave their children with their mothers, as illustrated in the novels examined herein, and attempt to reclaim them later. The children then grow up in a community headed by these elders where there is a significant generation gap, as one generation is absent. Also, if unforeseen pregnancies result, the mothers send their babies home to their own mothers as working and childminding are mutually exclusive for some. This is particularly so when they have jobs as live in domestic helpers, as seen in Zobel's and Foster's works.

The situation is complicated, however, when the grandmother is no longer able to provide the care necessary for these children, and/or when the children reach an age where they must move to the capital themselves in search of more opportunities, i.e. education.

This example is not limited to the Bahamas though. A similar trend could be seen in Jamaica, Haiti, Guadeloupe, for example. In these countries, where the population is growing faster than that in the developed world, there is often an unproportionate ratio of people to jobs. So, again the beginning of a trend in migrations and emigrations. There is always a migratory workforce which moves from island to island or from island to metropolis. Also, due to economic hardship, political turmoil, and violence, persons leave their home countries destined for other places where living would be easier. Hence the movements of Haitians to the Bahamas, Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, Canada and The United States, to name only a few. The similar movement of Jamaicans and Dominicans is also prevalent. Guadeloupeans would move more to Martinique and France in search of opportunities. The former group would go in search of jobs in projects such as the domestic scheme Foster discusses in *Sleep On, Beloved*. In such situations the woman are usually required to be unmarried and childless. As articulated in Foster's novel, some of the women bend the truth as to their childlessness and leave their children with their mothers or another female relation. This theme appears to be timeless and non-country specific, as Edgell similarly demonstrates the trend in Belize as does Polard in Jamaica. While there is the flood to fill poorly paying domestic jobs there is also a move simply to leave their home countries as illegal boat people in search of a new home. Perhaps a good illustration of this would be the exodus of Haitians from Haiti early in 2000 because of the upcoming general elections and political turmoil. While it is not abnormal for women to leave children with their mothers in cases such as these, it is also common for them to take as many people as they can. Money, however, poses a problem; passage out of Haiti, into exile is often very expensive (due to its illegality). After establishing themselves in a place and beginning to earn an income, remittances are sent home to support the family. These remittances are a constantly repeated theme in Caribbean literature as seen in Polard's short story, 'My Mother'. The grandmother then, remains the primary caregiver. As Foster's Miss Howells states: She is the man in the house. This is often due to the absence of grandfathers. The families, therefore, rely heavily on the remittances sent by working parents.

So, while projects similar to the construction of the Panama canal may no longer offer the kind of large-scale migration seen then, there are smaller instances that will continue the trend. Cane cutters are still needed in the Dominican Republic and in Florida. Men, and even women, will opt to labour in such projects, in spite of awful conditions and horrendous labour practices. This is the only way of surviving and/or trying to improve one's situation. Grandmothers and 'Othermothers' are

therefore still in large demand. They, therefore, continue to play an expanded role in their societies.

With a lowering of the age of mothers, and, therefore, grandmothers another complication arises. That is that many older women are themselves still actively in search of work or involved in the workforce. This means that children are often left with minimal or no supervision, as there is no other adult around. This also has an impact on the relationship or bonding between the individuals, and the influence of the elder woman on her young charges.

Moreover, with the recent change in some religious practices in many Caribbean countries, attitudes to family life and traditions are also changing. This is to say that, religions such as the Pentecostal Faith have taken a strong foothold in many parts of the region. These churches frown on single-parenthood and illegitimacy. That does not signify, however, that they no longer occur. Often, they are simply not spoken of. Or a mother will raise her daughter's child as if it were her own. The daughter will be kept out of site during her pregnancy and then brought back to participate only minimally in the child's upbringing, as if it were a sibling. This religious aspect of society affects the culture in other ways also.

One such impact is that, the oral culture, of which the grandmothers are often guardians, is seen as sinful. On occasion, when an elder in a rural community is asked for old stories or folktales, the response is often: 'I don't lie'. The old tales are preached against as lies and immoral living. Be that as it may, there are still those who will remain complicit with the preacher in order not to be read out of the church, but still , as GB does, live a completely duplicitous life, and continue the oral tradition from the safety and quiet of their home. The society, as examined in Jean Besson's work, allows certain behaviour that the church condemns, because there are always distinct cultural codes operating within any one society.

All of this considered, it would seem that even though changing trends would argue for an alteration in the grandmother's role, she remains a significant rhythm in the lives of her offspring. This would arguably still be evident in the literature except in a new and interesting way. The depiction of the relationship between grandmother and grandchild will probably change to articulate a more modern dynamic. There will perhaps be more mention of the United States's involvement in, and impact on lives, because of the increased presence of this world power in the region. The heavy influence of the United States on the region is already being seen in works such as Edwidge Danticat's, and other writers whose characters seek refuge in that country. Similarly, there has already been a marked difference in the way Cristina García's work articulates a change from the previous trend in the Cuban

exile community to maintain a hostile relationship with Castro's Cuba to a more open relationship. This change will perhaps be carried on in future generations whose link to the island will lie mainly in the older relatives still their or the memories of those who have gone into exile.

Ongoing creolisation would also have a tremendous impact on the literature. While new literary forms will be explored, new influences will also be seen and felt. The substantial migration of Cubans and Haitians to the Bahamas, for example, will perhaps be articulated in the writing from there. A new, one could argue, trend of having to travel from the Bahamas to Cuba in search of roots, could begin to resound in Bahamian/Cuban literature. There is also a marked difference with the exiles who left in earlier periods to those who are leaving now. The newer arrivals are less likely to sever all ties with their home country and are more likely to send money back. Also, the immigrants' and exiles' experiences with detention in the last half of the 1990s will also affect the literature. However, the same timeless or seemingly timeless issues of exile and migration will still surface as hundreds of Dominicans and Haitians take to the seas in unsafe boats monthly to escape hardship in their own countries. They are, however, met with a great deal of hostility on the other side.

Furthermore, the grandmother continues to provide the bedrock of a large part of Caribbean communities. While grandmothers may no longer often be illiterate, as M'man Tine was, because of increased exposure to education, there will perhaps be less urgency to educate their offspring. However, education remains, to this day, one of the most effective ways of striving out of poverty. Education is also different at the end of the Twentieth-Century than it was during the periods that Zobel, Foster, and other authors write about. There is far more cultural diversity in the classroom and there is less of a focus on cutting away the indigenous culture to replace it with the coloniser's culture. This is, however, not so much changed in the French Caribbean. Exams and curricula are more often created within the region or in North America, except in those countries still under direct colonial rule. The latter has become an extension of the Caribbean reality with its inclusion in a large percentage of homes through satellite and Cable television.

The relationship between the Caribbean individual and education is, therefore, far less hostile. That does not imply however that there are no problems with cultural loss and alienation. While Zobel's, Schwarz-Bart's, Foster's, and Bennett's protagonist grandchildren had no television and little cinema to impact on their psyche, oral culture played a larger role in social activities of the community, newer generations will have a completely different outlook toward mass-media and,

thereby, have a different relationship with the oral culture. The former increases with a directly proportionate decrease in the latter.

An interesting question would then remain as to whether the colour barrier education begins to cross is still in existence. As trends change in the region and self-government has been in place for many countries for at least thirty years, colour politics still remain polemical. Meanwhile, Caribbean societies may not be rendered as definitively inferior as they were when Froude and Long were writing, but attempts at 'Othering' the region are still existent. However, the efforts and the outcomes are distinct. Most attempts are now to simply trivialise everything in the region to tourism and an exotic destination where the inhabitants are, once again, presented as mere backdrops to a pleasurable holiday.

So, while spheres of influence change other issues appear to remain fairly constant. The grandmother continues to provide a foundational function within her community. She, herself, has also changed though. She will be less likely to be as poorly educated in contemporary arts as Reine Sans Nom or M'man Tine were, so her position in society will arguably be somewhat different. That is not to say, however, that all women have moved out of the canefields and can now read. There still remains a large percentage of Caribbean peoples who are illiterate and suffer the debilitating labour of the cane harvest. Even those who have moved out of the fields find themselves stuck in service jobs as maids and domestics that vary little from Télumée's job in the *béké's* house. While the grandmother asserts great effort to change society, simultaneously attempting to deconstruct barriers which impede her and her offspring's progress in society she must still deal with her continuing the trend of male superiority. In spite of strides seemingly being taken to change patriarchal control by educating women, and women taking on a more prominent, productive, and active role in society, there still remains the belief, overwhelmingly, that women should provide for the success of their men. How then does the grandmother meet with the challenges of an ever changing, but still very *machista* society? Will she continue to insist that boys be brought up in as superior to girls? Will her catch phrase remains: 'when my cock loos, tie your hen'? Or, will she realise that such cultural dynamics continue to perpetuate her own, and her female offspring's marginality? Can the grandmother continue to play her role as initiator of change and not reinstate these gendered roles? Ultimately then, at the dawning of the Twenty First Century it remains to be seen whether the role of the Caribbean grandmother in the region's literature continues as a fundamentally grounding rhythm which repeats across time and space, as it has been for the last six or more decades. Perhaps younger writers will create grandmother characters who break with all

traditions in favour of a completely new approach to life or a new politics. So much will depend on the type of impact life continues to have upon the writer, as to her/his representation of the grandmother in autobiographical and fictional works. Perhaps, the grandmother will continue to be such a significant polyrhythm in Caribbean literature as long as life continues to perpetuate itself as is. As long as Caribbean societies remain non-Western and open to multi-generational extended families, kinship networks, and community groups who form families and respect the wisdom of older members, these older women will continue to be anchors, spiritual and otherwise, for their offspring. It depends on how the grandmother's relationship with her grandchildren develops and the dynamics involved, which will, arguably, determine her representation in the meta-literature of a multicultural, fragmented, but unified repeating island, thereby making the grandmother into a rhythm which repeats itself across time and space.

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